Biblical Theology of Life in the Old Testament

Edited by

Albert J. Coetsee
& Francois P. Viljoen

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AOSIS

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Research Justification

Life is a primary theme in Scripture. The Bible starts with a description of (the living) God creating and sustaining life, and ends with a depiction of life eternal in the new heaven and earth. Between numerous references to both life and death are found, expressed in the rich diversity of the various books, corpora and genres of Scripture.

Much has been published on what Scripture teaches about life and death. However, no comprehensive biblical theology in which the concept of life is traced throughout the different books and corpora of the Old and New Testament has been published to date. It is this lacuna that the current publication aims to fill, assuming that such an approach can provide a valuable contribution to the theological discourse on life and related concepts.

The primary aim of this publication is to give an indication of the different nuances of the concept of life in the various books and corpora of the Old and New Testament by providing the reader with a book-by-book overview of the concept of life in Scripture. The secondary aim is to give an indication of the overall use and function of the concept of life in the Old Testament, the New Testament and Scripture as a whole. The latter is provided by using the findings of the book-by-book overview of the concept of life in Scripture to draw the lines together.

The scope of this investigation is the Protestant canon, working with the final form of the biblical books in Hebrew and Greek. The study employs biblical theology as its methodology.

The results of this investigation are published in two volumes, the first covering the Old Testament, and the second the New Testament. The current volume traces the concept of life in the Old Testament, consisting of three chapters on the concept in the Pentateuch, and one chapter each for the concept in the Former Prophets, the Major Prophets, the Minor Prophets, the Psalms, the book of Job, the book of Proverbs, the Scrolls, the book of Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles.

The various chapters of this volume are written by biblical scholars who are experts in their fields. As such, this volume represents scholarly discourse for scholars. All chapters are original investigations with original results, and were cleared of possible plagiarism by using iThenticate.

Dr Albert J. Coetsee, Unit for Reformed Theology and the Development of the South African Society, Sub-Programme Bibliological Perspectives, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa.

Contents

Contents

Abbreviations, Boxes, Figures and Tables Appearing in the Text and Notes

List of Abbreviations

BHRG	Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar
DBLH	Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)
EABS	European Association of Biblical Studies
ESV	English Standard Version
HALOT	Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
IBR	Institute for Biblical Research
MT	Masoretic Text
NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis
NIV	New International Version
NRF	National Research Foundation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTSSA	Old Testament Society of South Africa
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SLO	Student Learning Outcomes
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
THAT	Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament
TLOT	Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament

List of Tables

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After pastoring local churches in the Johannesburg area for 21 years, P.P. (Paul) Krüger served as a theological professor at the Theological School of the Reformed Churches in South Africa and associate professor of Old Testament at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, lately part of the North-West University. Presently, he is an extraordinary researcher at the North-West University. He holds a master's degree in Semitic Languages and a ThD in Old Testament, focusing on the application of text linguistics to Old Testament texts. His academic interests include Old Testament theology, hermeneutics, coherence relations in Biblical texts and exegetical methodology especially regarding the narratives of the Pentateuch and Former Prophets.

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Chris van der Walt was a minister in the Reformed Churches in South Africa for 21 years. During his years in ministry he completed a PhD in the Old Testament, investigating the identity of Israel in the book of Isaiah. Since 2011 he is a professor in Old Testament at the Theological School Potchefstroom and the Faculty of Theology of the North-West University. He has delivered a number of papers on the prophets and eco-theology at international conferences of the SBL, European Association of Biblical Studies (EABS) and Old Testament Society of South Africa (OTSSA) from which articles were published in international journals. He also lectured on invitation in Zambia and the Netherlands. In appreciation for God's creation he enjoys cycling and photography.

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Preface

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Investigating a concept so fundamental to the Scriptures and our existence has been a most enriching experience. As editors we are amazed not only by the sheer amount of references to 'life' in Scripture, but also by the rich diversity in which the concept is employed throughout its pages. We hope and trust that readers may find these volumes as enjoyable as it was in writing and compiling them, and that it may stimulate more in-depth discussion on life in Scripture. Above all, we pray that these volumes may edify the church, contribute to the coming of the kingdom and be to the glory of God's name.

We would like to express our gratitude to the following people and organisations:

- First and foremost, we thank each author for their contribution. The amount of time and energy they invested in this project is overwhelming, and their passion for biblical scholarship is contagious.
- Prof. Koos Vorster and Mrs. Bertha Oberholzer of the *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* office and the editorial board for *Reformed Theology in Africa Series* are one (two!) of a kind. Thank you for your assistance and motivation throughout the project.
- We also express our gratitude for the professional and most helpful staff members of AOSIS, especially Mrs Trudie Retief, Dr Anna Azarch, Mr Michael Maart and Prof. Andries van Aarde.
- Finally, we thank the *Unit for Reformed Theology and the Development of the South African Society* for the financial aid in making the publication of these volumes possible.

It is with great appreciation that the chapter on Life in Revelation by Prof. Jan A. du Rand (03 August 1945 – 09 March 2021) forms part of this two-volume publication. Jan presented the concept chapter during a mini-conference in

preparation of this publication and subsequently submitted this chapter. Since then we learned with great concern that he fell ill, and on 09 March 2021 received the notice that he passed away. During his lifetime, Jan made a huge contribution towards the study of the New Testament in South Africa and abroad. Besides his work on Hermeneutics, the Corpus Paulinum and Bible translation, his contribution in the Gospel and Epistles of John, Revelation and Eschatology is outstanding. We believe that with his passing Jan could tangibly and delightfully embrace the glory of which he wrote in his chapter on life in Revelation. In many ways, and very much so during this project on the Biblical Theology of Life, he touched our lives as an academic, mentor, leader, and friend. Jan A. du Rand left a legacy that inspires, and one that we can aspire to.

A Biblical Theology of Life: An introduction

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■ The necessity of this publication

Life is one of the most foundational aspects of existence. It is universal to all organic matter. People of all cultures and all kinds of animals and plants are considered (prior to death) as 'living'. As such, life is a major theme in the deliberations of biologists, ecologists, philosophers, theologians, musicians, poets, health practitioners and politicians.

As could be expected, life is also a primary theme in Scripture. The Bible starts with a description of (the living) God creating and sustaining life, and ends with a depiction of life eternal in the new heaven and earth.

Between numerous references are found to both life and death, expressed in the rich diversity of the various books, corpora and genres of Scripture.

Much has been published on what Scripture teaches about life and death.

Theological dictionaries have made a significant contribution in exploring the concept of life and related terms and the Biblical text. Contributors to this publication therefore made extensive use of dictionaries such as of Botterweck and Ringgren (eds. 1975–2015), Jenni and Westermann (eds. 1997), VanGemeren (ed. 1997), Brown (ed. 1978–1986) and Kittel (ed. 1964–1976), to mention but a few of the most prominent ones.

Besides these dictionaries, the following studies seem to have made a significant impact on the theological discourse on life and related concepts in the biblical text during recent years.

'Life in the face of death: The resurrection message of the New Testament' (1998), edited by Longenecker (ed. 1998), presents 12 papers by a distinguished group of evangelical scholars. It starts off with a survey of contemporary views about resurrection and the afterlife from various religions traditions. Eleven papers divided into four sections follow. The first section deals with 'Background perspectives' and attends to themes of (1) attitudes toward life, death and the afterlife in the ancient Near East, (2) attitudes toward life and death in the Greco-Roman World, and (3) the widespread belief of the Second Temple Judaism in God's power to destroy death itself and to restore a human person (body and spirit) to life, even beyond death. The second section deals with 'Portrayals of Jesus and his teaching' and themes of (1) Kingdom and resurrection in the Synoptic Gospels, and (2) a synthesis of the unique Johannine theology of resurrection and eternal life. The third section deals with 'The message of Paul' and themes of (1) resurrection and immortality in the Pauline Corpus, (2) the question whether there is a development in Paul's resurrection thought, and (3) resurrection and the Christian life. The fourth section deals with 'Experiences of the early church' and themes of (1) the resurrection traditions in the Acts of the Apostles, (2) Hebrews, and (3) the Apocalypse of John. The publication focusses on the text of the New Testament itself which results in textual arguments rather than dogmatic theory. The chapters concentrate largely on resurrection terminology in the various sections of Scripture, while theological reflection is somewhat limited.

In 2008, Geza Vermes published 'The resurrection; history and myth'. In part 1 of this publication, he discusses 'Afterlife in the Jewish World before Jesus'. He surveys the Old Testament's view of the finality of death, the concept of Sheol and the few stories of individuals who were raised from the dead or who ascended to heaven. He argues that beliefs in bodily resurrection and the immortality of the soul arose as answers to martyrdom and that there is no evidence either for belief in resurrection by Jews apart

from the Pharisees or for pervasive Pharisaic influence on Jewish belief in general. In part 2, 'Resurrection and eternal life in the New Testament', he addresses Jesus' teachings on resurrection and eternal life, his predictions of his resurrection, stories of those raised from the dead and the various New Testament traditions of Jesus' resurrection. He discusses various stories of the empty tomb and post resurrection appearances, Jesus' descent into Hades and concepts of final judgement. The book ends with 'Six theories to explain the resurrection'. He suggests that Jesus' post Easter appearances are spiritual and non-bodily. He assumes that stories of both the empty tomb and the appearances circulated very shortly after Jesus' death. He opposes the view that Jesus' resurrection is central to New Testament Christology, and regards it simply as part of the initial stage of belief in Jesus' exaltation.

The article 'The Meaning of "Life" in the Hebrew Bible' (2013) by Shemaryahu Talmon offers a significant study on the meaning of 'life' in the Hebrew Bible. He argues that the Hebrew Bible reveals a high esteem for physical life and human existence 'here and now'. Life and happiness are evaluated positively, while death and affliction are evaluated negatively. Death and affliction are seen as the negative counterparts to life and happiness. Death is the final end of human existence. The individual can only live on through his or her offspring. According to Talmon, the life which the Hebrew Bible promotes is a just and righteous life in the society which founds itself in the Holy Land promised by God.

In his study, 'Resurrection of the Dead in early Judaism, 200 BCE-CE 200', C.D. Elledge (2017) critiques Vermes' argument that there was no belief of resurrection among Jews besides that of the Pharisees. He limits his attention to the latest writings of the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls and the writings of other Jewish authors from that time. His intention with this focus is to avoid projecting back from later Jewish and Christian understandings of resurrection, and to provide the context from which later Christian and Jewish belief in resurrection evolved. Elledge suggests that general characteristics of resurrection during this period is an eschatological event by the agency of the divine. The divine will restore those who have died to an embodied existence once more. The study addresses two conceptions of resurrection, namely, the modes of human embodiment and the different spatial arenas of resurrection. It critiques scholarship that proposes external influences for the rise of resurrection belief in Judaism, such as the Persian Zoroastrian hypothesis or Canaanite and Egyptian influences. It was rather social pressures and realities in the Hellenistic age that sparked internal and varied developments among Jewish scribes to reinterpreted Jewish myths and oracles. The study identifies three tendencies in the literature of the time to legitimate the belief in resurrection, namely, the rise of theodicy, the logic of creation and divine justice. The

study continues by examining the relationship between resurrection and immortality. From the 'Book of the Watchers', which was composed in the 3rd century BC, it seems that a hope for resurrection evolved earlier than Daniel 7–12 and the revolt of the Maccabees. Elledge discusses the relationship between resurrection, divine judgement and eschatological life. Based on these investigations, Elledge argues that resurrection belief emerged earlier than what some scholars assume and was growing in acceptance in wider Judaism.

As invaluable as these contributions are for the reflection on life in Scripture, it seems that to date no comprehensive biblical theology in which the concept of life is traced throughout the different books and corpora of the Old and New Testament has been published.[1] It is this lacuna that the current publication wants to fill. It is assumed that such an approach can provide a valuable contribution to the theological discourse on life and related concepts as outlined in this brief overview of existing research.

■ The aim and scope of this publication

The aim of this publication is twofold:

- On the one hand, it aims to give an indication of the different nuances of the concept of life in the various books and corpora of the Old and New Testament. This is achieved by providing the reader with a book-by-book overview of the concept of life in Scripture.
- On the other hand, the publication aims to give an indication of the overall use and function of the concept of life in the Old Testament, the New Testament and Scripture as a whole. This is done by using the findings of the book-by-book overview of the concept of life in Scripture to draw the lines together.

The scope of this investigation is the Protestant canon, based on the conviction that it 'composes the divinely inspired, authoritative material for doing biblical theology' (Beale 2011:2; cf. Carson 1995:27–29; Hasel 1996:24). Although academic discussion of the possible compositional history of each biblical book is taken into account, and where necessary discussed, the current study works with the final form of the biblical books in Hebrew and Greek (cf. Sailhamer 2002:36; Schultz 2002:96).

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1. Ollenburger (2004), Hafemann and House (2007) and Mead (2007), for example, do not list and discuss life as a central theme in their biblical theological investigations of some of the main themes of Scripture. Scobie (2003), however, does have entries for 'the living God' (2003:105–147) and 'life' (2003:880–927) in his biblical theology. In the former, Scobie gives an overview of the Bible's witness to God, and in the latter an overview of various aspects of life (e.g. peace, healing, blessing, joy) and death. His work, although important and helpful, differs from the current publication in terms of aim and scope.

■ The methodology employed in this publication

In order to achieve the abovementioned aims of this publication, we decided on conducting a biblical theological investigation.

Choosing biblical theology, however, can be viewed as daring, because scholars do not agree on its exact nature, function, principles or method (Goldsworthy 2012:35; Hafemann 2002:16; Scobie 2003:3; cf. Ollenburger 2004:3). Despite a history of more than 200 years,[2] the term is still used in a variety of ways.[3] Klink and Lockett (2012) strikingly capture this by stating that:

> *Biblical theology* has become a catchphrase, a wax nose that can mean anything from the historical-critical method applied to the Bible to a theological interpretation of Scripture that in practice appears to leave history out of the equation altogether. (p. 13)

Along the same lines, Carson (1995; cf. Childs 1970:95; Goldsworthy 2012:76) concedes that:

> At one level, there cannot be a 'right' or 'wrong' definition of biblical theology […] Everyone is free to use the expression as he or she sees fit. (p. 27)

In light of this, it is not strange that some scholars doubt 'the usefulness of such a discipline' (Goldsworthy 2012:23).

The rub of biblical theology lies in the departure points and approach of the one employing it (cf. Goldsworthy 2012:38, 215). In this publication, biblical theology is understood and applied in the following way: viewing 'Scripture as a whole' (House 2002:269), biblical theology attempts to provide 'a "big picture"' from the 'bulk and variety of biblical literature' (Goldsworthy 2012:19) by reading the 'Biblical material holistically' (Martens 1977:123) 'in their final form, and in concert with one another' (Hafemann & House 2007:17) in order 'to uncover the overarching theology of the Bible as it develops throughout the canon'. '[W]ith historical and literary sensitivity' (Rosner 2000:10) for the various parts, and taking into account the 'principle of historic progression' (Vos 1948:16), it aims 'to work inductively from the text' (Carson 1995:29) of the various biblical books in order 'to understand the parts in relation to the whole' (Rosner 2000:3), arriving at 'the unity of

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2. For the history of biblical theology, see Scobie (2003:9–28) and Mead (2007:13–59). For the history of Old Testament theology, see Hasel (1991:10–27), Brueggemann (1997:1–114), House (1998:11–53) and Ollenburger (2004). For the history of the Biblical Theology Movement, see Bartholomew (2004:4–10).

3. See among others Carson (1995:18–26) for an overview of competing definitions of biblical theology. Klink and Lockett (2012) give a very helpful overview of how biblical theology can be understood by indicating where five approaches to biblical theology can be placed on a 'history' and 'theology' axis. They discuss biblical theology as historical description, history of redemption, worldview-story, canonical approach and theological construction.

its message within its diversity' (Goldsworthy 2012:28) 'while not overlooking the diversity' (Goldsworthy 2012:40). Consequently, it works 'inductively from within the Bible in an attempt to bring out the Bible's own message' (Hafemann 2002:16), honouring 'Scripture's own self-testimony' (Hasel 1996:27). Biblical theology, in the words of Vos as early as 1894,[4] 'is nothing else than *the exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity*' (cited in ed. Gaffin 1980:15; [*emphasis in original*]).

This is the broad definition of biblical theology followed in this study, applied to the pursuit of determining the different nuances of the concept of life in the various books and corpora of the Old and New Testament, as well as the overall use and function of the concept of life in Scripture as a whole.

A number of diverse methodologies can be identified within biblical theology (cf. Bartholomew 2004:11; Hasel 1991:38–114, 1993:72–132; Mead 2007:121–167). Some biblical theologies are thematic, some are diachronic, while others can be considered as contextual studies of individual texts, books or corpora (cf. Goldsworthy 2012:217–225). Other biblical theologies focus on the Old Testament,[5] some on the New Testament[6] and some on Scripture as a whole.[7]

The current investigation can be considered as thematic (it investigates the concept of life), contextual (it focuses on what the individual books of Scripture teaches about life) and diachronic (it investigates the progressive use of the concept of life in Scripture), while providing a theology of Scripture as a whole (it investigates the concept of life in all 66 canonical books).

There are numerous advantages of this type of biblical theology for the investigation of the concept of life in Scripture, including the following:

- In the first place, it enables each biblical book's discrete nuance on life to be heard (cf. House 2002:274).
- Secondly, it covers the whole of Scripture's revelation about life.
- Thirdly, by letting every biblical book speak for itself and investigating the theme of life Scripture as a whole, it avoids being 'hopelessly reductionist' (Goldsworthy 2012:24).

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4. These words are from Vos' inaugural address as Professor of Biblical Theology in Princeton Theological Seminary, printed in Gaffin (ed. 1980:15).

5. For examples of biblical theologies on the Old Testament, see Eichrodt (1961–1964), Von Rad (1962–1965), Brueggemann (1997), House (1998), Goldingay (2003–2009) and Waltke (2007).

6. For examples of biblical theologies on the New Testament, see Marshall (2004), Thielman (2005) and Schreiner (2008).

7. For examples of biblical theologies on the whole of Scripture (Old and New Testament), see Childs (1992), Kaiser (2008), Beale (2011), Bartholomew and Goheen (2012) and Schreiner (2013).

- Fourthly, by drawing the lines together, it gives a 'canonical synthesis' of the concept of life in Scripture (cf. House 2002:277).
- Fifthly, by providing the above, some of its findings can be used and applied by the church as normative for today (cf. Schultz 2002:96).

■ The instructions given to contributors of this publication

Once we had identified the lacuna that this publication aims to address, and decided on the general methodology of biblical theology, we invited various Old and New Testament scholars to contribute to the publication. These scholars were hand-picked according to their specialisation. Not wanting to inhibit their academic freedom, creative writing or the specific intricacies of life in the biblical book(s) allotted to them, we provided them with the following general instructions:

We envisage scholars to do the following with the Biblical book(s) assigned to them:

- to give an overview of the occurrence of the concept of life in the book(s)
- to group together similar references to the concept of life in the book(s) and discuss their content
- to focus especially on unique or special references to the concept of life in the book(s)
- to elaborate on the theological contribution of the book(s) with regard to the concept of life.

The chapters that follow reflect the freedom allowed to contributors in their presentation of the material, while still keeping to these core instructions.[8]

These chapters were first presented at a small conference held for all the contributors on 30–31 January 2020 in Potchefstroom, South Africa, and reflect various suggestions made by colleagues during the conference.

■ The structure of the chapters in this publication

The first volume (vol. 5, this book) deals with the concept of life in the Old Testament, tracing the concept in its different books and corpora. Following the order of the Biblical books according to the Hebrew canon, three chapters

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8. The same freedom was more or less allowed by Hafemann and House (2007:16–17) in their publication on seven basic themes in biblical theology: the '[i]ndividual interests' of the contributors 'were allowed latitude', and each one presented their findings 'in the manner they deemed best'.

are devoted to the Pentateuch, three to the Prophets and six to the Writings. An overview of these chapters with their respective writers is presented:

1. A Biblical Theology of Life: An introduction (Albert J. Coetsee & Francois P. Viljoen)

☐ *Life in the Pentateuch*

2. Life in the Pentateuch (1): Genesis 1–11 (P.P. [Paul] Krüger)
3. Life in the Pentateuch (2): Genesis 12 – Numbers 36 (P.P. [Paul] Krüger)
4. Life in the Pentateuch (3): Deuteronomy (Albert J. Coetsee)

☐ *Life in the Prophets*

5. Life in the Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings (David G. Firth)
6. Life in the Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel (Chris van der Walt)
7. Life in the Minor Prophets: Hosea – Malachi (S.D. [Fanie] Snyman)

☐ *Life in the Writings*

8. Life in the Psalms (Herculaas [Herrie] F. van Rooy)
9. Life in Job (Lance Hawley)
10. Life in Proverbs (Robin Gallaher Branch)
11. Life in the Scrolls: Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther (Gideon R. Kotzé)
12. Life in Daniel (H.J.M. [Hans] van Deventer)
13. Life in Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles (Willem Boshoff)

The rationale behind the division of chapters is as follows:

*   As life is such a prominent theme in the creation narratives of Genesis, we decided to devote a whole chapter to Genesis 1–11. This is supported by the fact that various scholars treat Genesis 1–11 as a unit (the so-called 'universal history'), with the calling of Abram in Genesis 12 as a specific turning-point in the book.
*   Deuteronomy forms both the culmination of the Pentateuch and the introduction to the Deuteronomistic History. Moreover, unlike the rest of the Pentateuch, the concept of life has a very specific nuance in Deuteronomy. For this reason, a separate chapter is devoted to life in Deuteronomy.
*   In light of the previous, Genesis 12 to Numbers 36 are grouped together in a chapter, covering the time from the calling of Abram up to the second generation in the wilderness.
*   For both traditional and practical reasons, the Former Prophets, Major Prophets and Minor Prophets are discussed in three consecutive chapters.

- The chapters on the Writings are mostly delineated according to traditional literary divisions, as is the case with the Psalms, Job and Proverbs. For practical reasons, the five Scrolls are treated as a unit, while Daniel, which is *sui generis* in the Old Testament, is treated on its own. Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles are discussed in a single chapter because of its similar historical background (and possible authorship).

The second volume (vol. 6; Viljoen & Coetsee 2021) deals with the concept of life in the respective books and corpora of New Testament. Following the traditional canonical order of the New Testament books, three chapters are devoted to the Gospels and Acts, three to the Pauline Letters, three to the General Epistles and one to the book of Revelation. The volume concludes with a summative theological perspective of the development of the concept of life through the Old and New Testament. An overview of the chapters in Volume 6 with their respective writers is presented:

☐ *Life in the Gospels and Acts*

1. Life in the Synoptic Gospels (Francois P. Viljoen)
2. Life in the Fourth Gospel and the letters of John (Gert J.C. Jordaan)
3. Life in the Acts of the Apostles (Nina E. Müller van Velden)

☐ *Life in the Pauline Letters*

4. Life in the Pauline Letters (1): Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon (the undisputed Pauline letters) (Philip La Grange du Toit)
5. Life in the Pauline Letters (2): Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians (disputed Pauline letters) (Elma M. Cornelius)
6. Life in the Pauline Letters (3): Life in the Pastoral Epistles (Aldred A. Genade)

☐ *Life in the General Epistles*

7. Life in Hebrews (Gert J. Steyn)
8. Life in James (M. Bruce Button)
9. Life in Peter and Jude: The life pattern of the Christian believer (Hennie Goede)

☐ *Life in Revelation*

10. Life in Revelation: Life in an eschatological progression of renewal towards its climax in the New Jerusalem, according to the Apocalypse of John (Jan A. du Rand)

☐ ***Summative chapter***

11. A Biblical theology of life: A synopsis of life in Scripture (Albert J. Coetsee and Francois P. Viljoen)

The basis for the division of these chapters is as follows:

- Academic consensus supports the treatment of the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John and Acts in separate chapters. Because of space restrictions, as well as discussions on the authorship of the Johannine Letters, the latter are grouped together with the Gospel of John.
- The Pauline Letters almost makes up half of the books of the New Testament. In order to present the research on the concept of life in this corpus in bite-size format, some sort of division was necessary. Although the academic debate on the authorship of the Pauline literature is a contentious matter, and although various scholars working on this publication support the Pauline authorship of all 13 letters, it was decided to divide the books according to authorship, and to treat the Pastoral Letters in a separate chapter. Consequently, one chapter covers the so-called 'undisputed' Pauline Letters, one the 'disputed' Pauline Letters and one the Pastoral Letters.
- Coming to the General Epistles, Hebrews and James are discussed in separate chapters, while the short letter of Jude is grouped together with first and second Peter because of the similarities between Jude and second Peter.
- Revelation is discussed in a separate chapter because of its unique genre.

■ Conclusion

In this initial investigation, a number of studies have been identified which offer valuable reflections on the meaning of life in Scripture. As no studies offering a comprehensive biblical theology in which the concept of life is traced throughout the different books and corpora of the Old and New Testament could be found, it seems that a publication that addresses this fact would provide a valuable addition to the theological discourse. This is what is presented in the chapters that follow. We trust that by providing this, some of its findings can be used and applied by the church as normative for today.

Life in the Pentateuch (1): Genesis 1–11: Life created and sustained

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■ Introduction

The first two chapters of this book are written back-to-back. In the present chapter, the focus is on the concept life in Genesis 1–11, the so-called Universal or Primary History. The next chapter explores life in Genesis 12 to Numbers 36.

Koorevaar and Steinberg (2013:61) call Genesis the foundational book for the whole Old Testament. Genesis should therefore be the foundational text for a theology of the Old Testament. For their Old Testament Theology Koorevaar and Steinberg (2013:61–62) identify elements or themes in Genesis, particularly in Genesis 1–11, that call for continuance and that should be traced in the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

The same approach is followed regarding a theology of life. As foundational text, Genesis provides the basic concepts and building blocks for a theology

of life. Moreover, Genesis is the Book of Births. The name of the book Genesis is derived from a Greek word reminiscent of ילד [procreate]. The noun תּוֹלֵדוֹת [generations, descendants, that what is born out of], derived from this verb, is a structural marker of the book Genesis. The group of terms indicating life (חיה and related terms) occur 125 times in Genesis, which is the maximum occurrence compared to all books in the Hebrew Bible. It represents 16% of the total occurrences in the Hebrew Bible (Gerleman 1971b:550).

The present chapter considers foundational aspects about life in Genesis 1–11 that inform the study of life in other biblical texts and that are thus relevant to the other chapters in the present publication. After giving a brief outline of primary and secondary references to life, this chapter offers a basic outline of a theology of life. The second chapter builds on these observations, applying them to the text of Genesis 12 through Numbers 36.

■ References to life

A brief survey of *words* referring to life in the Hebrew Bible serves as a general orientation regarding what the *concept* of life entails. Although the focus in this survey is on Genesis 1–11 and Genesis 12 to Numbers 36, the terms discussed are also relevant to the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, some references to the rest of the Hebrew Bible are included in this discussion.

■ Primary references

Primary references are those that refer explicitly to life or death. In this survey of primary references, as well as the rest of the chapter, the semantic counterpart of life, namely death, will be included.

Only words that are relevant to the theme of life (and death) will be considered. 'To live' may in certain contexts merely mean to 'occupy' or to 'dwell', which is only indirectly relevant to the theme of life.

□ Life

The broadest references to life in the Hebrew Bible are the terms related to the verb חיה. The stated verb refers to the condition 'to live, to remain alive' in the qal, and also to the onset or continuance of life in the pi and hi ('let live, preserve alive').[9] The noun חַי [life, a living entity] is usually used in the plural masculine form חַיִּים [life] and seldom in the plural feminine form [חַיּוֹת].[10] Two related nouns used in the Hebrew Bible are חַיָּה [living thing, animal]

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9. HALOT, 309–310 (חיה); Gesenius, 273–274 (חָיָה); DBLH (חָיָה).

10. HALOT, 307–308 (I חַי); Gesenius, 273 (חַי, B); DBLH 2644 (חַי, 1 & 3).

(e.g. in Gn 1:11, 24, 2:19, 3:1) and מִחְיָה [preservation of life, sustenance, living creature] (e.g. in Gn 45:5, Lv 13:10, 14).[11] The word חַי is also used as an adjective to denote 'alive' and 'living'.[12]

The Hebrew Bible often refers to the beginning of life with the verb ילד. In the qal it may refer to a woman 'giving birth' to a child, or a man 'begetting' a child. In genealogies of Genesis 1–11 the latter is sometimes translated as 'fathered' or 'became the father of'. Procreation is often only implied in the genealogies when the relationship of father–son is stated (e.g. in Gn 9:18, 11:29). The verb ילד is also used in the ni, pi, hi and ho with various shades of meaning, all referring to the onset of life or begetting life. A more general verb used for begetting or giving birth is יצא [to come forth], as in Genesis 25:26, 46:26, and Job 1:21.[13]

☐ Death

Death presupposes life, because death is the cessation of life. Without life there cannot be death, because death is not the same as no-life, that is, when there has not been life before.

Death (the noun מָוֶת) is expressed by various verbs.

☐ *Dying*

If life ends without an apparent outside agent, the individual who dies is the subject. A person 'dies' (the verb מות in the qal)[14] or 'perishes' (the verbs אבד and גוע, both in the qal).[15] The euphemism 'he rested' [שָׁכַב] 'with his fathers' (Gn 47:30; Dt 31:16) is often used with reference to a king (e.g. 1 Ki 2:10; 11:21). The expressions 'he was gathered' (ni [אסף]) 'with the fathers' (e.g. Gn 49:33; Jdg 2:10) or 'with his people' (e.g. Gn 25:8; 35:29; Nm 20:24, 26) are also used.

☐ *Killing*

People and animals are often killed by an outside agent, be it by God, other humans or even animals. In this case the individual who dies, is the object.

A number of verbs are used in the Hebrew Bible to describe such killings: qal of הרג (kill or murder), hi, po and ho of מות (respectively kill or be killed,

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11. HALOT, 310 (חָיָה), 568 (מִחְיָה); Gesenius, 274 (חָיָה), 464 (מִחְיָה); DBLH, 2651 (חָיָה), 4695 (מִחְיָה).

12. HALOT, 308–309 (II חַי); Gesenius, (חַי, A); DBLH, 2654 (II חַי, 1).

13. HALOT, 411 (ילד); DBLH, 3528 (ילד) The verb is used about 208 times for a mother bearing a child and some 22 times for a man begetting a child.

14. HALOT, 562 (מות qal); Gesenius, 460 (מות); DBLH, 4637 (מות).

15. HALOT, 2 (אבד, qal 3), 185 (גוע, 2); Gesenius, 3 (אָבַד, 2); DBLH, 6 (אָבַד, 1), 1588 (גָּוַע); Gerleman (1971c:894).

the latter used for a sacrificial animal), pi and hi of אבד (respectively cause to perish, destroy and exterminate), hi and ho of נכה [smite to death] and pi of כלה (destroy, consume).[16] Death is sometimes implied merely by mentioning the mode of killing: סקל (qal [to stone], ni [be stoned]) and שרף (qal [burn], e.g. as sacrifice; ni [be burned]). Drowning, implied in the stories of the Flood and the passing through the Sea of Reeds, is also a mode of dying or killing.

☐ God, humans and animals

The aforementioned terms typically refer to the temporary, physical existence of humans on this side of the grave. Reference to one's lifespan, is sometimes indicated as the 'days of' [יְמֵי], 'the years of' [שְׁנֵי] or 'the days of the years of' [יְמֵי שְׁנֵי] your life (Gn 47:9; 47:28; Ps 61:6; 90:9, 10, 15, etc.). Reference to the temporariness of one's stay on earth can be expressed by terms like מָגוֹר [temporary abode] in Genesis 47:9. The latter term can be translated as a synonym for 'life', as in the English Standard Version.

The narratives of Genesis to Numbers rarely reflect on life with a special quality. The notion of life that transcends temporary existence, is developed in many other texts in the Hebrew Bible. Deuteronomy 30:19 serves as an example, where God's people who do exist physically are urged to choose life (see ch. 3 of this book). Still, the Garden Narrative refers to a tree of life (עֵץ הַחַיִּים) that can give life to humans who already possess temporary life (Gn 2:9; 3:22,24). God told the man that he would surely die the day that he would eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gn 2:17). After he had eaten from that tree, he continued to live until old age (Gn 5:5). This confirms the observation that the Garden Narrative refers to life that transcends temporary, physical existence. Life here is associated with obedience to God (Brensinger 1997:108). Communion with God, indicated as 'walk' [לֵךְ] with or before God (hitp of הלך, e.g. in Gn 5:22, 24; Gn 17:1; see also the section titled 'Communion' in this chapter) or according to his statutes and his ways (qal of הלך, for example in Lv 11:4; Dt 11:22) also sketches life that is more than mere existence.

Life is also attributed to *animals*. Actually, the term חַיָּה is used extensively to indicate living creatures, especially wild animals (Gn 1:24–25, 28; 2:19; 3:1; 9:5; Ex 23:11; Lv 11:2; Nm 35:3 etc.). חַיָּה collectively means 'the living'.

God[17] is explicitly called the 'living God' (אֵל חַי, אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים and similar terms) 14 times in the Hebrew Bible. The oath formula חַי־יְהֹוָה, occurring 41 times in the

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16. HALOT, 255 (הרג), 563 (מות, hi po and ho), 3 (אבד, pi 2, hi), 698 (נכה, hi 2, ho 2), 477 (כלה, pi 4(c)); Gesenius, 231 (הָרַג), 460 (מות qal 2, polel, hi, ho), 2 (אָבַד pi 3, hi), 550 (נָכָה, hi 2(c) ho 2), 398 (כָּלָה, pi 3); DBLH, 222 (הָרַג), 4637 (מות, 1 polel, hi, ho), 6 (אָבַד pi, hi), 5782 (נָכָה, 3), 3983 (כָּלָה, 5 pi); Geleman (1971c:894–895).

17. For the sake of discussion here and further on, the Name 'God' is used as reference for the Godhead, except where the argument necessitates specific reference to YHWH.

Hebrew Bible, also implies that God lives. Yet life is not an attribute of God similar to creatures (Gerleman 1971b:554–555). Unlike creatures he cannot die. Rather he is the one who gives and takes life.

God is called the living God in the context of his deeds. He lives because he acts (e.g. Jos 3:10; 1 Sm 17:26), speaks (Dt 5:26) and sees (Gn 16:13–14). He transcends the generations and is therefore indicated as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in contexts where he lives and acts while these patriarchs have already died (Ex 3:6, 15, 16 and some 12 additional places in the Hebrew Bible). God, his years, his name and his loving kindness endure from generation to generation (Ex 3:15; Ps 90:1; 100:5, 202:12, 24 etc.). This implies that he lives forever.

In the Hebrew Old Testament, plants are not indicated as living entities (Gerleman 1971b:552), probably because they do not move on their own accord. Only humans and animals live and die. However, there are instances where plants that thrive or wither are compared with human life and death (Ps 1:1–3; Is 40:6–8). Plants are at the most life-like entities.

In the Hebrew Bible, life is attributed to water. Genesis 26:19 tells of Isaac's servants who discovered a well with 'living water' [מַיִם חַיִּים], which means that the flowing water is reminiscent of a living being (see also Song of Sons 4:15; Jr 2:13; 17:13; Zch 14:8). This does not mean that water possess life, but that characteristics of living entities are attributed to these objects metaphorically. Still, water is regarded as a precondition for life (see the section titled 'Water' later in this chapter).

The rest of the discussion will therefore focus on *human* and *animal* life, while taking into account the fact that *God* is depicted as the source of all life.

◼ Secondary references

There are numerous *secondary references* to life in the Hebrew Bible. The most obvious secondary references are *metonyms*, where human attributes associated with life are used to denote life. One may also use the broader term, 'metaphorical references', for these secondary references.

☐ Flesh

Flesh [בָּשָׂר] often refers to the soft tissue of humans and animals in contradistinction to the skeleton (see Gn 2:21). Whereas the bones mostly survive the ravages of time, the flesh quickly decomposes after death. As it is perishable, בָּשָׂר is used for life in its fragility.[18]

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18. HALOT, 164 (בָּשָׂר, 8b); Gesenius, 146 (בָּשָׂר, 2); DBLH, 1414 (בָּשָׂר, 2); Hilbrands (2013:166).

Flesh is often associated with life itself. The term 'all flesh' [כָּל־בָּשָׂר] can be used for humans and animals alike.[19] This term occurs some 32 times in the Hebrew Bible, for example, in the Flood Account (Gn 6:12, etc.) and in passages like Isaiah 40:5–6.

☐ Breath

According to common knowledge a dead human or animal no longer breathes. In the drowning scenes (the Flood and at the Sea of Reeds) the notion is that death sets in when there is absence of breath. Thus 'breath' (רוּחַ or נְשָׁמָה) is closely associated with life.

In certain contexts, the broader term of the two, רוּחַ (spirit or wind) refers to 'breath which supports life'.[20] In Genesis 6:17 and Genesis 7:15 the phrase רוּחַ חַיִּים is used in the same sense as נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים. God's spirit (רוּחַ יְהוָה) is depicted in Genesis 6:3–4 and Ezekiel 37:1–14 as the principle of life, giving life to people and causing death when withdrawn (Hilbrands 2013:166).

The term נְשָׁמָה refers more specifically to 'breath'.[21] Man becomes a living being when God breathed into his nostrils the 'breath of life' (נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים; Gn 2:7), which in this context means the 'breath *giving* life'.

In Genesis 7:22 the two terms are used in conjunction to indicate the 'breath of life' [נִשְׁמַת רוּחַ חַיִּים]. It is used for every living being on the dry ground, both humans and animals, that is, all flesh who perished in the Flood (Gn 7:21). As God is the agent both in Genesis 2:7 and 7:21–22, the notion is that it is God who both gives and takes the breath of life.

When Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob died, it is said of each (according to many modern translations) that he 'breathed his last' (Gn 25:8, 17, 35:29, 49:33). In these instances, the verb גוע (see the section titled 'Death' earlier in this chapter) is used. The verb may allude to 'gasping for breath, to expire or breathe out one's life'.[22] In Psalm 104:29 this verb is used to indicate what happens when God 'takes away the breath' [רוּחַ] of living beings.

☐ Person

The semantic range of the Hebrew term נֶפֶשׁ, often translated as 'soul', is quite broad; therefore, it is notoriously difficult to define and just as difficult to translate. It should be understood and translated variously in different contexts.

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19. HALOT, 164 (בָּשָׂר, 9); Gesenius, 146 (בָּשָׂר, 2); DBLH, 1414 (בָּשָׂר, 1).

20. HALOT, 1199 (רוּחַ, 6); see also DBLH, 8120 (רוּחַ, 3).

21. HALOT, 730 (נְשָׁמָה); DBLH, 5981 (נְשָׁמָה, 1).

22. HALOT, 185 (גוע, 1) with reference to Driver; Gesenius, 163 (גוע); DBLH, 1588 (גוע).

In the Hebrew Bible נֶפֶשׁ is often used in a comprehensive sense to indicate the 'person' or 'creature' and seldom as some spiritual entity apart from the human body.[23] When God breathes into the man the breath of life, he becomes a 'living entity' (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה;[24] Gn 2:7). Not only human beings, but also animals are called נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה (e.g. Gn 1:20, 24; 9:10, 16; Lv 11:10, 46).

The word נֶפֶשׁ corresponds to words in cognate Semitic languages that denote the throat, breathing or inhalation.[25] In this sense, the term corresponds to נְשָׁמָה. When Leah dies, it is said that her נֶפֶשׁ goes out (Gn 35:18). Joseph's brothers refer to the distress of their brother's נֶפֶשׁ when he begs for his life (Gn 42:21), which is possibly a reference to shortness of breath in a situation of anguish.

The word נֶפֶשׁ is often used to indicate one's 'personality' or 'innermost being'.[26] Although this meaning is often translated as 'soul', such a translation is a misnomer because it may lead to misinterpretation as if 'soul' is an object distinct from one's bodily existence. One does not *have* a נֶפֶשׁ but *is* a נֶפֶשׁ.

Whether נֶפֶשׁ denotes the living entity itself, the person, some vital principle, personality or breath, the term is closely related to the concept of life.[27] In certain contexts, the word נֶפֶשׁ is interchangeable with the word חַיִּים (Gerleman 1971b:553). In the context of murder, God says that he will require a reckoning for the נֶפֶשׁ of man, which refers to wrongful taking of a life (Gn 9:5). Lot has to flee for his נֶפֶשׁ (Gn 19:17), which refers to the possible loss of this life. David refers to Saul who seeks his נֶפֶשׁ (1 Sam 20:1). David refers to Saul who seeks his נֶפֶשׁ (1 Sam 20:1).

☐ Blood

A metonym frequently used for life and death in the Hebrew Bible is the word blood [דָּם], being 'the red liquid in creatures which is essential for life' (DBLH 1947, 1 דָּם). Secondary meanings of דָּם include the following.[28]

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23. Steiner (2015:11–12, 115, 124) argues with reference to the Aramaic (Samal) funerary monument of Katumuwa and other texts that נֶפֶשׁ can in certain biblical contexts refer to something other than a human body; it can refer to a disembodied soul.

24. HALOT, 712 (נֶפֶשׁ, 4); DBLH, 5883 (נְשָׁמָה, 1 & 3).

25. HALOT, 712 (נֶפֶשׁ, esp. 1 & 3); Gesenius, 558–559 (נֶפֶשׁ ni, שׁ, 1); DBLH, 5883 (נֶפֶשׁ, 6 & 5).

26. HALOT, 712–713 (נֶפֶשׁ, esp. 6 & 8); DBLH, 5883 (נֶפֶשׁ, 2).

27. HALOT, 713 (נֶפֶשׁ, 7), claims that נֶפֶשׁ is used in the sense of 'life' some 280 times in the Hebrew Bible.

28. HALOT, 224–225 (דָּם); DBLH, 1947 (דָּם, 2–8); Kedar-Kopfstein (1977:III:240–241); Gerleman (1971a:448).

☐ *Life-blood*

The word דָּם is used as a substitute for the concept *life* itself because blood is considered as the seat (*Sitz*) of life. The vitality (נֶפֶשׁ) of flesh resides in the blood (נֶפֶשׁ הַבָּשָׂר בַּדָּם; Lv 17:11; see also Gn 9:4). The rationale of the prohibition in the dietary laws of the Pentateuch regarding meat, is the notion that blood is the seat of life. As life is considered sacrosanct, one is not allowed to consume life-bearing blood.

☐ *Death-blood*

Massive loss of blood means loss of life, so that the word דָּם can imply shedding of blood and thus *death*. The sacrificial system is based upon the assumption that spilled blood represents a life (of an animal) taken, so that it can serve as a substitute for the life of the person who makes the sacrifice.

☐ *Blood of murder or slaughter*

דָּם may also refer to the act of taking the physical life of another, that is, 'killing' (e.g. in Nm 35:33a). Such killing may be accidental killing or premeditated murder. The first occurrence of the noun דָּם in the Hebrew Bible, is in the plural and refers to the spilled blood of Abel, which is personified (Gn 4:10). 'Shedding of blood' [שָׁפַךְ + דָּם] indicates the violent death of humans (e.g. Gn 9:6; Dt 21:7; 2 Ki 21:16) or slaughter of animals (e.g. Lv 17:13).

■ Preconditions of life

Apart from the primary and secondary references, the concept of life is signified by means of conceptual frames. Instead of specific words or terms, the concept of life is evidenced in various *preconditions* for life. These preconditions are associated with life so that one may even use these preconditions as metaphors or substitutes for life itself. To the modern mind heat, oxygen, water and food would be such substitutes. In Genesis 1–11 indicators of life are: light, water, food, land, communion and fertility.

■ Light

In the Hebrew Bible 'light is often used metaphorically for life' (Wenham 1987:18). Darkness symbolises death.

In Genesis 1, the act of creating an ordered universe is initiated as God said: 'Let there be light', and there was light (Gn 1:3). Genesis 1 is structured in such a way that subsequent creative acts are dependent on preceding creative acts. Thus, the creation of living beings (Day 5 and Day 6 of creation) presupposes light (Day 1) as well as various entities set in place on the

subsequent days of creation (Days 2–4). Thus, light is depicted as the first precondition for life.

God also creates luminaries in the expanse of heaven to regulate time (Gn 1:14). In Genesis 1:14–17 this function of the luminaries is emphasised along with their light-giving characteristics. These sources of light are thus depicted as instruments enabling an orderly existence. Life without the progression of time, without 'days of your life' (Gn 3:14, 17), is inconceivable.

■ Water

In Genesis 1–11, water relates to life or death in two ways: Water sustains life and water also drowns:

□ Sustaining water

The Hebrew Bible bears witness to the fact that life can only be sustained when there is water to drink. Although this is evident throughout the Hebrew Bible, Genesis 2 lays the foundation for this concept. The Garden Narrative opens by confirming that life is not possible without rain and other forms of moisture (Gn 2:5–6).[29] Then the garden is described as a type of oasis in the midst of an arid landscape, watered by a single river that divides into four headstreams (Gn 2:10–14). The river emanates from Eden, the abode of God, which is seen as the source of life (Dumbrell 2013:42; Vos 1948:28). Life abounds in the garden because it is well-watered.

□ Drowning water

Water is also an instrument of death because living beings (animals and humans) tend to drown in water. In the Pentateuch there are two pivotal drowning scenes, of which the first one, the Flood Narrative, occurs in Genesis 6:5–8:22. It is remarkable that nowhere in these narratives a Hebrew word for 'drowning' is used, but the implication is clear: God (as the agent) used submersion in water to take lives.

All living beings, namely humans, animals, creeping things and birds, were wiped out by the Flood (Gn 6:21–23). At the same time God used water to save the lives of Noah and his family. The same water in which all flesh drowned, lifted up the ark.

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29. Genesis 2:5 mentions rain and 2:6 refers to אֵד, which is variously understood as a 'mist', 'stream' or 'spring' (HALOT, 11 (אֵד); DBLH, 16 (אֵד); Hamilton 1990:154–156). For the present argument the form of moisture is not relevant.

■ Food

A third precondition for life is food. Natural life is dependent on food. References to eating [אכל], food (מַאֲכָל, אָכְלָה and related nouns) and bread [לֶחֶם] as synecdoche for food, abound in the Hebrew Bible. Terms like רעב [*be hungry, suffer famine*] and רָעָב [*famine*] fall within the same semantic domain as food because they indicate a lack of food that may lead to death.[30]

In the Creation Account of Genesis 1, God apportions food to every living creature. He assigns specific food to humankind so that they could fulfil their duties (Gn 1:29). Next God gives every green plant as food to all animals, that is, to everything that has the breath of life [נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה] in it (Gn 1:30).

In the Garden Narrative food also plays an important role. God allows the man [הָאָדָם] to eat from all the trees in the garden, except from a specific tree (Gn 2:16–17). After the man and woman have indeed eaten from the forbidden tree, the man is cursed specifically regarding his daily food and the way he (and per implication his descendants) will in future procure food (Gn 3):

> [C]ursed is the ground because of you;
> in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
> and you shall eat the plants of the field.
> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread [...]. (vv. 17–19)

This curse implies a form of deprivation or death. The next generation, Cain and Abel, are characterised by terms of the way each of them produces food: Abel is a keeper of sheep and Cain a worker of the ground (Gn 4:2).

After the Flood the question about permissible food for humankind is revisited. Now humankind is allowed to eat all that move and live, with the exclusion of blood as bearer of life (Gn 9:4–5).

■ Land

Land also relates to life. Various terms are used in the Hebrew Bible for this concept such as אֶרֶץ, אֲדָמָה and שָׂדֶה. The last two terms are specifically used in connection with food production.

The word אֲדָמָה is typically used for cultivable land (Grisanti 1997:270) as in Genesis 2:5, 3:23, 4:2 and 9:20. Man is placed in a well-defined space, a garden [גַּן], with the mandate to work it and take care of it (Gn 2:15). The tree of life in the middle of the garden symbolises life. Even the other trees in the garden may be seen as symbols of life because trees as symbols of life are well-known in the Bible (Wenham 1987:62).

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30. Subdomain 23A in Louw and Nida (1989).

The importance of a well-defined space that can be owned, occupied, and freely used, is emphasised, even irrespective of agricultural use. To man his mandate to work and take care of the garden means fulfilment of life. Expulsion from this garden (Gn 2:24) means that he will have to toil to make a living from the ground (Gn 3:19), with starvation and death as a possible outcome if he would not work hard.

Life inside God's garden and in fellowship with God means security. Outside the garden there is a constant threat of bodily harm and murder, as Abel experiences (Gn 4:8), of which Cain is aware (Gn 4:14–15) and which Lamech considers (Gn 4:23–24).

God expected humankind to fill the earth (Gn 1:28; 9:1), that is that future generations would move apart and settle in different localities. The descendants of Noah decided to build a city in the land of Shinar with the deliberate purpose to prevent humankind from being dispersed over the whole of the earth (Gn 11:4). God frustrated this plan and dispersed humankind over the face of the earth (Gn 11:9). Life would be ordered according to specific, defined living spaces for specific families and nations. For communal life as God intended, defined living spaces matter. The so-called table of nations of Genesis 10 gives a description how peoples 'spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations' (Gn 10:5; see also Gn 10:35).

■ Communion

Communion in the sense of intimate fellowship, close relationship and belonging, is closely related to life, especially meaningful life that involves more than mere existence.[31]

Natural relationships between people give a sense of security and belonging. It is hard to imagine life without meaningful relationships. Discord between people is associated with death (e.g. Gn 4:5b–8; 23), while fellowship sets the stage for meaningful life. God declared that it is not good for the man to be alone. He then made the woman as a helper (Gn 2:18, 20). This concept of helper [עֵזֶר] is defined as 'his counterpart or his complement' [כְּנֶגְדּוֹ],[32] which emphasises the aspect of close fellowship between the man and the woman. So close would be this unity, that the man would 'hold fast or cleave unto' [דבק] his wife and that they would 'become one flesh' [בָּשָׂר אֶחָד] (Gn 3:24). Sexual intercourse, which is linked to procreation of life, is seen as intimate knowing (ידע) (Gn 4:1, 17, 25). Related terms are used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible

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31. Communion is explored by Vriezen (1966) in a theology of communion (Dutch: '*verkeer*' or '*gemeenschap*'). Walton (2017) takes God's presence as a central theme.

32. HALOT, 665 (נֶגֶד, 1): 'like his opposite'/'proper for him'; DBLH, 5584 (נֶגֶד): 'counterpart', that is, 'that object which is corresponding or like another object'.

(e.g. דַּעַת אֱלֹהִים in Pr 9:10; 30:3) when referring to intimate knowledge of God (Vriezen 1966:191).

The fact that humankind was created in the image of God (Gn 1:26), received his dominion as command from God (Gn 1:28) and was answerable to God, implies dependency on God and fellowship with God (Helberg 1996:30). According to the Garden Narrative, God breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, which means that he received life directly from God in deep dependence on him (Helberg 1996:30). This lays the foundation for close fellowship with God. The tree of life in the middle of the garden (Gn 2:9) and even Eden, from where the life-giving waters emanated (Gn 2:10) suggested God's close presence.

After their transgression Adam and Eve were expelled from God's close presence (Gn 2:24). The history of Cain is a story of alienation from God. He went 'away from the presence of God' (Gn 4:16). However, the descendants of Seth started to seek his presence by calling on his name (Gn 4:26). The history of Enoch teaches that the bond of life with God is stronger than death (Helberg 1996:42). Enoch's relationship with God is described in terms of walking together with a trusted friend. He 'walked with God' (hitp of הלך + אֶת) (Gn 5:22, 24).

■ Fertility

Fertility as the ability to procreate, is a creational '*élan vital*', a life force.

In Genesis 1 God addresses the sea creatures, birds and humankind with the charge to be 'fruitful' and to 'multiply' and to 'fill' their respective habitats (Gn 1:22, 28). This decree stayed in force after the curses on the man and woman (Gn 3:16–20). Humans were still to be fruitful and multiply, and they did indeed multiply. That this would be the case, is confirmed when Adam named his wife 'Life'. In a play on words, he called her 'Eve' [חַוָּה], because she would become the mother of 'all living' [כָּל־חָי] (Gn 3:20). This assertion is confirmed by Genesis 4, where no less than 11 births are reported with the explicit use of the verb ילד, and Genesis 5 where numerous births are mentioned, also recorded with the use of the verb ילד. Fertility and life are inseparable concepts.

The decree of Genesis 1 was even upheld when God decided to wipe out (in the words of the text) 'everything that have the breath of life in its nostrils' (Gn 7:22). God still wanted to preserve mankind as well as other living beings, so that there would be an 'offspring' [זֶרַע] (Gn 7:3). For this reason, God had beforehand commissioned Noah to build the ark. After the Flood, the charge of Genesis 1 was expanded. Now *all* living beings must be fruitful and multiply. They must swarm (שׁרץ) the earth (Gn 8:17).

There are no less than nine genealogies in the book of Genesis, of which five occur in Genesis 1–11 (Gn 4:17–22; 5:1–32; 10:1–32; 11:1–26; 11:27–32). They emphasise that humankind was indeed fruitful and did multiply and that life continues from generation to generation under God's providence in spite of all kinds of hardship. This makes the genealogies so important.

■ Theological trajectories

A theology of life will describe major themes or trajectories related to life. In this section, a brief outline of three such trajectories is offered. Only a monograph or articles on each of these trajectories will do justice to these trajectories. Each trajectory is illustrated with reference to Genesis 1–11.

These trajectories are: creation, procreation and recreation.

■ Life in creation

The first trajectory is creational life, that is, life that comes from lifelessness, life where there has never been life. God is depicted as the source, owner and sustainer of creational life.

□ Source of life

God created heavens and earth, the sea and all that is in them (Gn 1:ff. see also Ex 20:11). According to Genesis 1 God made the creatures of the sea and sky on the fifth day of creation, and the land creatures and humankind on the sixth day. All of these living creatures came into being as a result of God's words.[33] He issued a decree in the case of the animals (Gn 1:20, 24), and deliberated in the case of humankind (Gn 1:26).

The living creatures were all made 'according to [their] kind' [לְמִינ־], which suggests that God is responsible for biological diversity. When God created humans,[34] he created two 'kinds' of humans, namely 'masculine' [זָכָר] and 'feminine' [נְקֵבָה].[35]

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33. The *wayyiqtol* verbs, וַיִּבְרָא and וַיַּעַשׂ at the beginning of verses 21, 25 and 27 indicate the result of God's decrees/deliberation, and not separate acts. He made/created through his word. The end of verse 24 confirms such an interpretation, for God's speech act in this instance is explicitly followed by 'and it was so' [וַיְהִי־כֵן]. The verbs ברא and עשׂה are used interchangeably. In the context of God as the source of life, they are synonyms.

34. The word אָדָם [man] is used collectively in Genesis 1:26–27 and 5:2 in the sense of 'humans', as it is followed by plural pronominal suffixes ('they'). The focus in Genesis 1 is not on a single human being or first human couple, but on humankind.

35. These two Hebrew words in Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 5:2 do not indicate individuals as in Genesis 2, but sexual categories, which probably coincides with the 21st-century concept of 'gender'.

In the Garden Narrative the focus is on the first human couple. God formed the man [הָאָדָם] from the dust[36] of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Gn 2:7). He also formed out of the ground every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens (Gn 2:19). Later he made a woman [אִשָּׁה] from the side or rib of the man (Gn 2:21–22). As in Genesis 1, God is portrayed as the origin of life. Unlike Genesis 1, God is portrayed in Genesis 2 as making life from existing material (dust or another living being).

No definition of life is given, but there are some indications in the first chapters of Genesis regarding what may be regarded as characteristics of life. As stated in the section titled 'God, humans and animals', life is specifically attributed to animals (fauna) and humans. These are entities that, to different degrees, can move, socialise, recreate, act and make decisions. Human life is characterised by the fact that humans were made in God's image. In the immediate context of Genesis 1, humans as God's image are linked to their dominion over the animals, that is, the other living beings (Gn 1:28) (Hilbrands 2013:13). According to Genesis 2, man had to name the animals (Gn 2:19–20), which is also an act of dominion. Man was answerable to God according to Genesis 2. He had to work and keep God's garden (Gn 2:15) and heed to God's prohibition (Gn 2:17). Initially, man had a free will so that he could decide to obey God's command or disobey. Care and the ability to decide are thus characteristics of human life.

☐ Owner of life

Once God had created living beings, he did not surrender his ownership of all that live and thus also the life that he has given to them. God remains the owner of life.

From the beginning it was clear that life was not to be taken for granted. Man would certainly die if he would eat from the forbidden fruit (Gn 2:17). The implication is that God (and he alone) may and will take life. After man had been expelled from the garden, God also prevented the man from reaching the tree of life (Gn 3:24), which confirmed God's ownership of life. After Cain had murdered his brother Abel, God exerted his ownership of life by calling Cain to account for the life that he has taken. The blood of Abel, which personifies Abel in death (see the earlier section titled 'Blood') kept on calling to God as the owner (Gn 4:9–10).

God decides on the lifespan of individuals. He actively killed people according to his divine wrath during the Flood (see earlier section titled 'Water'). According to Genesis 9:5, God will demand an accounting from

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36. Dust is often used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to indicate fragility or transitoriness (HALOT, 862 [עָפָר], with reference to Ps 103:14; Job 4:19; 8:19; 10:9 and Qoh 3:20; 12:7).

humans as well as from animals for the life-blood [דָּם לְנֶפֶשׁ], it is the killing of a (human) life. This means that God as the owner of life sustains his right to take life.

Human life is regarded as sacrosanct because man was created in God's image (Gn 9):

Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed,
for God made man in his own image. (v. 6)

The *yiqtol* ni of שׁפך in this context should be understood as a command ('must be shed') rather than a prophetic utterance of what will happen ('will be shed'), for example, that man inevitably shall shed blood through personal revenge.[37]

☐ Sustainer of life

Not only does not God cede his claim on the life that he has given, but he also does not abandon the entities that he has created. Once God has created a living being, he does not stand down, but sustains the life that he has given.

In the first chapters of Genesis, the reader soon learns that life is eclipsed by death. Adam and Eve were expelled from the life-giving environment of the garden, and henceforth had to work hard in order to eat and live. Outside the garden, the history of humankind is marked by disintegration of life. In Genesis 4, we read no less than five times of killing [הרג] (Gn 4:8, 14, 12, 23, 25). Cain killed his brother Abel. Then Cain was in danger of being killed. Lamech warned that he will kill anybody who do him harm. This is only the beginning of a long story of violence and murder, where life is frustrated by death. The genealogy of Genesis 5 contains the refrain 'and he died' [וַיָּמֹת] no less than eight times.

Still, God is portrayed as the sustainer of life because he makes sure that life continues, in spite of the scourge of death. Outside the garden life went on in spite of death. Humankind created new things through their cultural endeavours and thus reflected something of God as a creator. This is evident in the lineage of Cain, where it is said that people made musical instruments and started to work copper and iron (Gn 4:21–22). Only God can create in absolute sense, but humans can create from existing things. Life in creation is thus sustained through humankind, both in their continuing existence and their endeavours, in spite of the destructive force of death.

Even death, the semantic counterpart of life, is not something happening apart from God's provision for life. Death only sets in when God decides that life should no longer be sustained.

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37. The long *yiqtol* can express a deontic modality, namely a directive (BHRG, §19.3.5.1).

■ Life in procreation

A second major theme related to life is procreation. Not only does God sustain existent life (see the section titled 'Sustainer of life'), but he also *replicates* life through procreation. Life in procreation is life stemming from life.

▫ Procreation in own likeness

Fertility is not unique to humans, because animals also reproduce (see the section titled 'Fertility'), but the way Adam and Eve reproduced themselves is unique. This makes human procreation more than mere fertility.

Eve specifically acknowledged that she had acquired her firstborn 'with the help of the Lord' (Gn 4:1). Adam begot (hi of ילד) a son in his own likeness, after his image (Gn 5:3).[38] Begetting a child is an act of procreation, and is similar to God who created or made man in his own likeness (Gn 5:1–3).

Procreation builds on creation. This is the implication of the genealogy that follows in Genesis 5 on the statement that Adam begot a son. The subsequent generators all procreated (hi of ילד) a son. In his procreation Adam is the prototype of the whole human race that will procreate. We are created by God through procreation, which is carried along an unbroken chain of generations.

God can create *un*mediated, for example, by speaking (see the section titled 'Source of life'). Procreation as described in the Hebrew Bible always refers to reproduction involving a biological father and a biological mother.

▫ Sustainer of procreation

Generally, in Genesis 1–11 fertility and procreation are taken for granted. Humankind fills the earth. It is only from Genesis 12 onward that the reader of the Hebrew Bible really learns that life in procreation is constantly under threat and that God actively intervenes to let reproduction continue.

Still, even Genesis 1–11 gives evidence that not only life as such is frustrated in death, but procreation of life is often hindered by factors such as murder (Gn 4:8) and infertility (Gn 11:30). When somebody is murdered, all potential descendants are eliminated. When God decreed that a flood would destroy all life on earth (Gn 6:13, 17; 7:4), God also took care that not only some humans would be saved so that they could populate the earth after the Flood, but also that specimens of all living animals and birds would be preserved (Gn 6:18–20) in order to multiply and fill the earth (Gn 8:17). Thus, God is portrayed as the sustainer of procreation.

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38. The verb has no object, but his son Seth is implied – see the end of Verse 3.

▪ Life in recreation

A third trajectory related to life, is that of recreation in the sense that God re-installs or restores his plan with humankind. This happens after the beneficiaries of God's promises and care, have rebelled against him.

Recreation involves specific recreational acts, whereby God re-installs his promises and plans by introducing a new, unexpected situation, intended to change the beneficiaries themselves. God restores life even from a situation of death.

God may focus on specific people, narrowing down his promises to a remnant of the original group of beneficiaries. The later recreational acts, which fall outside the scope of the present chapter, especially relate to a remnant of the previous beneficiaries.

The beneficiaries of God's recreational acts in Genesis 1–11 are humankind in general, originally represented in the person of a single progenitor (Adam and Noah).

Recreation is tantamount to deliverance, but it involves more than deliverance *from* a situation of despair. Recreation also emphasises the new situation *unto which* the beneficiaries are saved. Recreation implies new life.

Two recreational acts take place in Genesis 1–11, namely the establishment of the Old Humanity after the Fall (Gn 3–5) and the New Humanity after the Flood (Gn 6–11). Both stages of God's recreational activity present God as the *initiator*, the *promiser*, the *fulfiller* and the *sustainer* of recreation.

☐ The initiator of recreation

A recreational act is always the result of God taking the initiative to reinstall his creational purposes with humankind. Such an initiative leads to a new and unexpected turn of events.

As a rule, God starts off by connecting to people who do not necessarily have a relationship with him and is thus deprived from full life. By communicating, it is through his word, he binds himself to them. This initiates communion, which in itself is already life-giving (see section titled 'Communion').

☐ *Old Humanity (after the Fall)*

When the man and his wife disobeyed God, they became estranged from God and hid from him (Gn 3:8). A situation of inevitable death ensued in light of God's prior warning (Gn 2:17), which spells decreation. God's curses (Gn 2:15–19) also suggest decreation.

However, God took the initiative to bridge the gap between him and the first human couple when he came seeking after them. He called out to Adam: 'Where are you?' (Gn 3:9). This sets the pattern for life after the Fall (the transgression of the first human couple), namely that God would remain involved with humanity. His personal involvement would translate into recreation and new life. The same genealogy in Genesis 5 that emphasises that humankind's history is one of disintegration and destruction, also emphasises that life continues (Helberg 1996:42).

☐ *New Humanity (after the Flood)*

As God saw that human wickedness was great on earth and that it was corrupt and full of lawlessness (Gn 6:5, 11–12), he decided that he would send a flood to make an end to all living things. Again a situation arose where there were no prospects that life on earth would continue. 'The flood is portrayed as a great act of decreation' (Wenham 2009:35).

God decided to usher in a new beginning with Noah, his family and a selection of all animals. A new humanity would stem from Noah and his sons. To this end, God took the initiative specifically by talking to Noah (Gn 6:8, 13–21; 7:1–4, etc.).

☐ The promise-giver of recreation

In recreation, God's promises give relief from a situation of despair and death. Major promises often mark a new creational act, which means that not all God's promises signify a new creational act.[39]

Promises are never meant to be mere informative words. In terms of the well-known distinction that Austen makes regarding speech acts: The locution of God's promises are meant to be owned and believed by the beneficiaries (illocution).[40] Even when these promises are unconditionally stated, they make an appeal to the recipients. If the recipients respond positively, the promises give hope and are therefore life-giving.

The promises are also life-changing. God's locution is intended to alter the recipient's behaviour (perlocution in terms of Austen). In this way, the words of promise instil new life in the recipients.

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39. Kaiser takes God's promises as an overarching theme of the Bible (Kaiser 2008). Major promises are usually encapsulated in covenants. A recreational act as conceptualised in this chapter and a biblical covenant may sometimes coincide, as promises are characteristic of both.

40. Austin (1975:100–108) distinguishes three speech acts: *locution* is what an utterance says at face value; *illocution* is what the speaker or author intends to say and wants to achieve; *perlocution* is when an utterance, clearly understood, elicits the desired reaction.

God's promises typically extend to the descendants of the recipient. They become heirs to the promises and are thus co-beneficiaries.

☐ *Old Humanity (after the Fall)*

After God had called Adam and Eve to account for their sins and exposed their guilt (Gn 3:11–13), he imposed the sentence on them and on the serpent. The penalty for their transgression should have been immediate death (Gn 2:17). However, God passed unexpected sentences on them, which suggested restoration:

• The serpent would be killed, not by God but by the seed of one of the human offenders, namely the woman. The curse on the serpent (Gn 3:15) is variously interpreted, inter alia, as protevangelium, where the seed of the woman is identified as the coming Messiah and the serpent as the devil (Krüger 2014). Whether or not the latter is a valid interpretation, the curse on the serpent gives a strange twist to the narrative. The seed of the co-offender becomes the executioner. God puts enmity between the serpent and the woman and between their offspring, which implies that God stands on the side of the women over and against the serpent. In the midst of a curse, this is good news for humankind. This is a promise of life, because the woman will not summarily die. The serpent will die. She and her seed will somehow survive and prevail.
• The same applies to the curse on the woman and the man (Gn 3:16–19). As they are the first human couple, these curses apply to their descendants as well.[41] The death sentence is mitigated to a life of misery in matters like childbirth and food production, but they will still live before returning to dust. They will live, albeit in the face of sure death. They will have the joy of parenthood and will benefit from the produce of the land. This is a promise of life, wrapped in two curses. The illocution of God's locution is a message of restoration.

According to the text, Adam understood God's sentence as a reprieve. His reaction (by way of perlocution) is to name his wife Eve, because she would become *the mother of all living* (Gn 3:20 – see also Section 'Fertility'). This is both an act of faith on his part and confirmation of God's original command to multiply (Hamilton 1990:206–207).

☐ *New Humanity (after the Flood)*

Twice God announced to Noah that he would make an end to *all life* (כָּל־בָּשָׂר) on earth (Gn 6:13, 17; 7:4). He also told Noah that he would do that by means

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41. As with promises, curses may extend to future generations. Genesis 2 and 3 offer a 'paradigm of sin' (Wenham 1987:90–91), which involves more than a model for future generations. The genealogies of Genesis and the recurrent תּוֹלְדוֹת formula indicate that corporate unity and accountability runs through generations.

of floodwaters (Gn 6:17; 7:4). However, God promised that he would not only preserve Noah and his family but would also keep alive specimens of all living creatures (Gn 6:18–20).

These promises are connected to a בְּרִית (Gn 6:18), which in this context is a covenant, containing stipulations: Noah must build an ark (Gn 6:14–21), make provision for animals (Gn 7:1–2) and enter the ark with his family (Gn 6:18).

Noah took God on his word. Noah did everything that God had commanded (Gn 6:20; 7:5). Thus God's promises changed Noah's life completely. He believed (illocution) and acted (perlocution).

In covenantal theology this בְּרִית with Noah before the Flood and the בְּרִית after the Flood (Gn 9:9–12) are usually telescoped into a single Noahic covenant (see e.g. House 1998:69–70; Robertson 1980:109–115; Waltke 2007:284; and recently Van Pelt 2020:111–131). This is questionable, because the text emphasises in Genesis 6 that Noah as a person is the chosen recipient (Hamilton 1990:283–284). In Genesis 9, the beneficiaries of the בְּרִית are 'all that lives' [כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה]. No specific action is required of these beneficiaries. Unlike typical covenants, this בְּרִית is not supplemented or incorporated by subsequent covenants.

In certain contexts the word בְּרִית can also refer to 'a pledge, a binding oath of promise' (BDLH 1382b) or 'a solemn commitment […] to undertake an obligation' (Waltke 2007:287). Whether or not the בְּרִית after the Flood is part of the Noahic covenant or not, it is a pledge that sets the parameters for God's recreated order.

☐ The fulfiller of recreation

The third aspect of life in recreation, is that God is the fulfiller of recreation. God fulfils recreation by doing new things, which may also be called salvic acts. He recreates the circumstances of the recipients by introducing a new order. Often statutes or rules for the new order are given, along with a sign confirming the new order.

However the recreated circumstances in themselves never constitute full restoration, but they open up expectations of full restoration. God's acts of deliverance in history are symbols of hope on the road to full recreation. They are open-ended in anticipation of something greater. In New Testament terms, one may call this open-endedness an eschatological anticipation.

☐ *Old Humanity (after the Fall)*

After the sentence in the garden, God fulfilled his recreational work. He made garments of skin (Gn 3:21). This was a deed of personal care. God, who had exposed Adam and Eve in their guilt, now covered them from shame and in a sense equipped them for the harsh life waiting for them.

God also banished them from the garden, which was a blessing in disguise. In their sinful state, they were not worthy of the garden. The garden would become a curse to them. They might well try to reverse the curse of death by reaching for the tree of life (Gn 3:24). This would seal their fate of life in misery. God wanted to do more than leave them in an eternal state of misery, it is life that is not really life. In this sense, the Garden Narrative ends open-endedly, in anticipation of something better.

☐ *New Humanity (after the Flood)*

God fulfilled his word to Noah by actually doing the unimaginable: He sent a catastrophic deluge that wiped out all life, but at the same time he saved all who went into the ark (see the section titled 'Water'). When the water had dried up, God said to Noah that he, his family and all living creatures may come out of the ark so that they can multiply on the earth (Gn 8:15–17) and rule over creation (per implication, Gn 9:2). Noah is thus portrayed as the New Adam. God 'reestablishes humanity' (Waltke 2007:296). The postdiluvian world parallels the creation out of chaotic water in Genesis 1, along with divine blessing and the mandate to be fruitful and multiply (Waltke 2007:307). 'Genesis 9 is a re-creation account' (Currid 2016:52).

However, there are also differences between the creational and recreational orders. Henceforth humans may use all the animals of the earth as food, except that their blood may not be eaten (Gn 9:2–4). All animals will fear humans.

The new creational order excludes the possibility of another deluge that will destroy life on earth. God promises that never again shall 'all flesh' [כָּל־בָּשָׂר] be destroyed by the waters of the flood (Gn 9:11, 15). This promise can be extended to all sorts of catastrophes on a very large scale in light of God's resolve in Genesis 8:21–22. God guaranteed that life would go on after the Flood in a new and sustainable way without a cosmic catastrophe. Still, local floods or disasters where humans and animals may perish, were not excluded. The recreative act of God is thus open-ended. Creation is still not fully restored.

God gave a sign as a symbol of hope on the road to full restoration of creation. The rainbow is the sign of his solemn promise (Gn 9:12–17). This sign was given so that *God* will remember his pledge [בְּרִית] (Gn 9:15–16) and not, as expected, so that all flesh on the earth will remember him.

☐ The sustainer of recreation

When God sustains *creation* (see the section titled 'Sustainer of life'), he allows life to continue though favourable circumstances. When God sustains *procreation* (see the section titled 'Procreation in own likeness'), he lets procreation through human agents continue by granting fertility and an offspring after their own kind. When God sustains *recreation*, he specifically

restores his plan of renewal when it is deliberately rejected and blocked by the beneficiaries. Time and again God does not allow his recreational program to be thwarted.

Instead of initiating a new recreational act, God often sustains a present stage in his agenda of restoration. He confirms existent recreational acts and their promises. In the Hebrew Bible this persistence of God to reaffirm and carry out his plan in spite of man's opposition and obstruction, is called his steadfast love [חֶסֶד] and faithfulness [אֱמֶת] (see Ex 34:6–7; Num 14:18–19, etc.).

☐ *Old Humanity (after the Fall)*

It seems as if God's provision for life to continue, was thwarted when Cain murdered his brother, Abel. Not only were Adam and Eve now left without descendants, but the two occupations of their sons that could help with a better life, the occupations of shepherd and tiller of the ground, were now left vacant. The new life that God gave after the Fall to the Old Humanity, was thwarted when Cain murdered Abel.

However, God upheld his promises by granting Adam and Eve another offspring [זֶרַע] (Gn 4:25). God re-established his seed promise through the godly lineage that issued from this offspring (Gn 4:26; 5). In a strange turn of events, God also restored meaningful toil and labour through various occupations through the lineage of Cain, whose descendants built a city and instituted stock-farming, the playing of music instruments and metal work (Gn 4:20–22).

☐ *New Humanity (after the Flood)*

The descendants of Noah as beneficiaries of the new order instituted after the Flood, eventually settled in the land Shinar, where they decided to build a city and a tower that would reach to the heavens so that they could make a name for themselves and not be scattered over the world (Gn 11:2–4). This decision was in direct violation of God's command after the Flood (Gn 9:1) and reflected an arrogance similar to that of the progenitors of the Old Humanity in the garden who wanted to be like God (Gn 3:5–6).

God did not allow his new order to be obstructed. He confused their language and scattered them over all the earth (Gn 11:7–9). The new humanity would be a humanity that never settles permanently. Nations will bring forth new nations. Nations will move and conquer. Individuals will move and live elsewhere as aliens and tenants. Although this dispersion of people represents a new stage in the history of mankind, no new promises or provisions for life are given, so that this does not constitute a new recreational order.

■ Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that primary and secondary references to life are widely attested in Genesis 1–11 as well in the rest of the Hebrew Bible (see the main section titled 'References to life'). However, the concept of life is not only contained in these references, but also in various preconditions for life, some of which serve as metaphors for life (see the main section titled 'Preconditions of life'). A theology of life is informed by these observations as well as the progression of the biblical narrative. This chapter puts forward an outline for a theology of life based on three life-related trajectories, which are relevant, not only to Genesis 1–11, but also to other biblical texts (see the main section titled 'Preconditions of life').

The first two trajectories, namely life in creation (see the section titled 'Life in creation') and life in procreation (see the section titled 'Life in procreation'), are prominent in Genesis 1–11, because this text focuses on creation and the natural spread of human and animal life on earth. These two trajectories are developed further in the canonical text of the Hebrew Bible in a variety of text types, including poetic and wisdom literature.

The third trajectory, life in recreation (see the section titled 'Life in recreation') describes the recurrent inauguration and sustainment of a new life order for God's beneficiaries after a situation of despair and immanent death has developed. As such the third trajectory is detectable mainly in the narratives that form part of the grand narrative of the Bible. In Genesis 1–11, this trajectory is visible in God's dealings with humanity in general during and after the Fall (Gn 3–5), as well as during and after the Flood (Gn 6–11).

The trajectory of recreation with its successive historical life orders are variously described in biblical theology:

• Reformed covenantal theology propounds successive *covenants*, which are also described as a single covenant with multiple administrations (Robertson 1980:27–42). Some of the covenants coincide with creational acts as put forward in this chapter, for example, the Abrahamitic covenant (God's own family) and the Sinaitic covenant (God's own people). Covenantal theology identifies some acts of God as covenants, which are not recreational acts according to the definitions offered in this chapter, such as the covenant of works. On the other hand, the return from exile is a major recreational act, something new that God did, although no new covenant was instituted. As texts like Isaiah fall outside the ambit of the present chapter, more research needs to be conducted on the return from exile from the perspective of the theology of life (see also ch. 6 of this book). Covenantal theology grapples with the notion of conditionality and unconditionality of covenants, with the Abrahamitic covenant as an example of an unconditional covenant and the Sinaitic covenant as an example of a conditional covenant (Waltke

2007:288–290). According to a theology of life as suggested in this chapter, such a distinction does not hold. When God recreates by means of his words of promise, these words are always meant to be owned. They are to be believed and to change the lives of the beneficiaries, irrespective of whether God explicitly demands reaction from the beneficiaries or not (see the section titled 'The promise-giver of recreation').

- The notion of successive *dispensations* is popular among many evangelicals. In dispensational theology, a new cycle of recreation would be called a new dispensation. There are considerable variations in the number and definitions of dispensations among dispensationalists. Some dispensations that are generally distinguished, may correspond to the recreational acts suggested in this chapter, such as the Old Humanity before the Flood (corresponding to the dispensation of conscience), the New Humanity after the Flood (corresponding to the dispensation of human government) and God's own family (corresponding to the dispensation of promise) (see the discussion in Robertson 1980:206–215). The main difference between a theology of life and classic dispensationalism is the emphasis of the latter on discontinuity, while a theology of life emphasises trajectories whereby God reintroduces his creational order and creational purposes for humankind. The dispensation of the church, in particular, represents a new plan of God for humankind, irrespective of the promises and conditions that applied to the previous dispensations (Kaiser 2008:26–27, 30).

The outline of three life-related trajectories, applied to Genesis 1–11 in this chapter, calls for further expansion and application to the rest of the grand narrative of the Old and New Testaments.

Life in the Pentateuch (2): Genesis 12 – Numbers 36: Life to God's chosen

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■ Introduction

The present chapter investigates life in Genesis 12 to Numbers 36. The text contains a variety of text types such as genealogies, songs and instructions, and also constitutes the first part of the grand narrative about Israel, which defines it as a separate unit within the Pentateuch and the Old Testament.

■ References to life

A brief survey of words referring to life (and death) in the Hebrew Bible, with the focus on Genesis 1–11 as well as Genesis 12 to Numbers 36, is offered in the second chapter of this book. Word study is therefore not explored further in the present chapter.

In summary, life is indicated by primary terms such as the noun חַי and related terms, as well as terms related to the verb ילד, which signify the onset of life. Death is expressed by various terms indicating dying or killing such as the verbs מות and הרג. Terms referring to life denote temporary, physical life of humans as well as human life with a special quality. Animals are described as living, and plants as life-like. God is explicitly called the living God in the Hebrew Bible, with numerous references where he is depicted as the source of life and not prone to death.

In the Hebrew Bible, there are also numerous terms that serve as secondary references to life (and death), such as flesh [בָּשָׂר], breath [נְשָׁמָה], person [נֶפֶשׁ] and blood [דָּם].

■ Preconditions of life

In Chapter 2, six preconditions for life are traced in Genesis 1–11. The same preconditions function in Genesis 12 to Numbers 36, and probably also in the rest of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and even in the Greek Bible (New Testament). These preconditions, which often serve as conceptual substitutes for life itself, are light, water, food, land, communion, and fertility.

■ Light

In Genesis 12 to Numbers 36 there are allusions of light being linked to the concept of life.

God instructs that there must be a golden lampstand with six branches in the sanctuary to give light in front of the veil of the most holy place (Ex 25:31–40; 37:17–24; Nm 8:1–4). The lampstand with its cups, buds and flowers represents a living tree. Light and darkness respectively symbolise God's salvation and judgement, and thus indirectly life and death. In the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:25 the light of God's face that shines upon the beneficiaries speaks of God's affective care [*gnädige Zuwendung*] (Sæbø 1971:88–89).

The plagues in Egypt all represent misery and death for the Egyptians, while at the same time some of the plagues depict a contrary situation for the Israelites, which spelled life. During the tenth plague every first born in the land of Egypt died, while those in Israel lived. This contrast between life and death is anticipated in the ninth plague when there is darkness over the land of Egypt, but light where the Israelites are living (Ex 10:21, 23). Israel live in the light, and during the exodus they travel at night, constantly being led by a pillar of fire to give them light (Ex 10:20–21).

While the notion that light makes life possible and symbolises life is present only in embryo in Genesis 12 to Numbers 36, it is developed explicitly in books like Psalms, Proverbs and Job where the two terms are mirrored in parallel phrases (Job 3:20; Ps 27:1; 36:9; Pr 6:23) and the expression 'the light of life' [אוֹר הַחַיִּים] (Job 33:30; Ps 56:14) is used, which can be understood as light that induces life.

■ Water

In Genesis 12 to Numbers 36 water relates to life or death in three respects: water sustains life, water purifies and water differentiates between life and death.

☐ Sustaining water

God rescued Hagar twice at water sources in the wilderness. The first incident happened as she was fleeing from her mistress, Sarah, and reached a spring of water on the way to Shur (Gn 16:7ff.). When she and her son, Ishmael, later fled again, they ran short of water in the wilderness of Beersheba (Gn 21:14ff.). If God had not come to their rescue with a well of water, they would have died (Gn 15:19).

In a landscape without perennial streams, community life (and strife) revolved around water wells because access to water was essential for survival. Both Abraham and his son Isaac had to settle disputes about the use of water wells (Gn 21:25; 26:20, 21). There are three stories about local herdsmen or women who gathered at wells to get water, where they met a stranger. The three stories are about Abraham's chief servant, Jacob and Moses. All three encounters led to marriages and thus the continuation of certain families (Gn 24:10ff.; 29:1ff.; Ex 2:15ff.).

In the wilderness, fresh water was crucial for the survival of the Israelites. At Marah, God gave them fresh water because they only had undrinkable water (Ex 15:22–25). They camped at Elim because there were 12 springs of water (Ex 15:27). Near Horeb, the people complained that Moses had brought them out of Egypt to kill them with thirst. God then gave them water out of a rock (Ex 17:1–7). Once again, at Kadesh, there was no water for the congregation. The people once again put the possibility of sure death before Moses. Again, God supplied water abundantly from a rock (Nm 20:1–13).

The need for water to sustain life is often mentioned in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, sometimes figuratively applied as in Psalm 63:1 and Isaiah 44:2, 58:11. There are numerous recollections of the wilderness experience, when God sustained life through water (e.g. Dt 18:15; Ps 78:16, 20; 105:41; 114:8; Is 48:21).

☐ Purifying water

Washing and sprinkling with water played an important role in the ceremonial laws. In many instances this made the difference between ceremonial uncleanness and thus exclusion from worship and the camp, and cleanness and full participation in worship and community life (e.g. Ex 40:12, 30–32; Lv 14:9; 15:11, 13; 16:26, 28; Nm 8:6–7; 19:7–8, 18–19; see also Ezk 36:25). For the priests this was literally a matter of life and death. When they wanted to enter the tent of meeting or approach the altar, they had to wash their hands and feet, so that they would not die (Ex 30:20–21).

☐ Drowning water

Water can lead to death by drowning. The second important drowning scene in the Hebrew Bible is where the army of Pharaoh, the chariots and horsemen, were swept into the Sea of Reeds (Ex 14:26–28; 15:4–6, 10, 12). As with the first drowning scene, the Great Flood,[42] both death and life are associated with masses of water. The same water that killed the Egyptians, formed a passage for God's people.

The notion that water is a drowning agent is not limited to the Pentateuch (Jnh 2:5; Ps 69:1; 124:4–5). In the rest of the Bible, the pentateuchal drowning scenes are emblematic of God's judgement of the wicked, which at the same time brings relief to his own people (e.g. Jos 4:23; Neh 9:9; Ps 106:9; 136:13, 15; Is 54:9; 1 Cor 10:1–2; Heb 11:29; 1 Pt 3:20). Through water God differentiates between people.

■ Food

Food, the third precondition for life, plays an important role in Genesis 12 to Numbers 36.

This is already apparent in the patriarchal narratives where lack of food plays a major role:

- Abraham went from Canaan to Egypt on account of a severe famine (Gn 12:10). Not only did the famine put his own life in danger, but the move to Egypt also put the promise of numerous descendants (Gn 12:2) – a promise about life in abundance – in jeopardy.
- After his return to Canaan, Abraham and his nephew Lot had to part because the land could not support them while they were staying together (Gn 13:5). Their livestock suffered because of insufficient grazing.
- In the Jacob narrative (the *toledoth* of Isaac), food plays a central role. Esau sold his birth right to Jacob because he had come in from the open

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42. See Chapter 2 for the first drowning scene.

country so famished that he thought he was about to die (Gn 25:29–34). This incident was decisive for the rest of the narrative. Later Jacob once again tricked his brother Esau when he obtained Isaac's blessing, and once again food played a decisive role (Gn 27:1ff.). Isaac blessed Jacob with promises about life: the dew of heaven and an abundance of grain and new wine (Gn 27:28). On the other hand, Esau had to hear from Isaac that his dwelling would be away from the earth's richness, away from the dew of heaven above (Gn 27:39). As a result, Esau wanted to kill his brother (Gn 27:41). At the first deception Esau was dying for food; now he wanted to kill because he was deprived of food. It was a matter of life and death when it came to food and food blessings.

• In the Joseph narrative (the *toledoth* of Jacob), the images in five of the six dreams are those of food and food production (Gn 37:7–8; 40:9–11, 16–17; 41:1–4, 5–7). That prepares the reader for the main issue in the story, namely a widespread famine that would bring Joseph's family to Egypt in search of food. In the end, Joseph put all the events, even the wrongs that his brothers had committed against him, within the framework of Gods providence 'to save lives' (Gn 50:20). By providing food, God had rescued them from starvation.

During the sojourn in the wilderness lack of food and the possibility of starvation is a real issue. On their way to Sinai, the people blamed Moses and Aaron that they had brought them into the desert to kill them with hunger. God responded by providing manna and quail in abundance (Ex 16:1–31). At Kibroth-Hattaavah the Israelites complained about the manna and craved for the meat, fish and vegetables that they had in Egypt. God then provided more quail than they could possibly eat, but in his anger also struck down people with a plague (Nm 11:4–34). In a strange way this incident linked food not only to life, but also to death.

Various regulations about the use and preservation of land (see the section titled 'Land') have in common the fact that food security must be sustained, both for the community and individuals in need. Food production and access to food is closely connected to the sustainment of life. Israel's cultic laws contain specific regulations regarding clean and unclean animals (Nm 11; 20:25), which has an indirect bearing on life as these laws set the pattern of daily life in the land of promise.

■ Land

Three terms are generally used in the Hebrew Bible for land, each with a specific shade of meaning: אֶרֶץ [*land or earth in general, soil, specific space*],[43]

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43. HALOT, 91, אֶרֶץ; DBL-H, 824; Wright (1997).

אֲדָמָה [*land or earth in general, soil or arable soil or land*][44] and שָׂדֶה [*specific piece of land or field for pasture or crops, territory*].[45]

In Genesis 12 to Numbers 36 אֲדָמָה and שָׂדֶה are used in the context of the sustainment of life. Although שָׂדֶה is sometimes used as a near synonym of אֲדָמָה (Grisanti 1997a:270; see Gn 47:20–24; 37:7; 41:48; 47:20, 24; Ex 23:11, etc.), אֲדָמָה is typically used to plant crops (e.g. Ex 23:19) and שָׂדֶה refers to the open, wide land (Grisanti 1997b:1217) where one hunts for animals (Gn 25:27, 29, 27:3, 5, 27), keeps livestock (Gn 29:2; 31:4; 34:5; Ex 9:19; 10:5, 15, etc.) or gathers edible plants (Gn 30:14).

As with the first humans (Gn 2), God allotted a specific space to a specific individual (and his descendants) when he called Abraham and promised him a specific land [אֶרֶץ] (Gn 12:1, 7; 15:7, 18; 18:8). So vital is this land that the rest of the grand narrative up to Numbers 36 is shaped by the prospect of the land. The patriarchs did not own the land. In Egypt, the Israelites were slaves without land, and in the wilderness they were wanderers, but eventually we find them at the border of the Promised Land. The land is repeatedly described as a 'land flowing from milk and honey' (Ex 3:8; 2:17; 13:5; 33:3; Lv 20:24; Nm 13:27; 14:8; 16:13–14), thus depicting it as a land that will sustain life abundantly. The epitome of life to the full, in the words of the fifth commandment, is 'that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you' (Ex 20:12). 'Humanness [...] life of a people with God', is connected to land, as an actual rootage in a historical place (Brueggemann 2002:5).

The narrative of Genesis 12 to Numbers 36 is open-ended as far as the fulfilment of the land promise is concerned. The book of Deuteronomy expands on the significance of the land for a full and prosperous life (e.g. Dt 6:10–12), and the book of Joshua describes the actual possession and division of the land.

On the one hand the Promised Land is God's gift to Israel (e.g. Gn 12:7; Ex 20:12; Nm 11:12). It is called Israel's 'inheritance' [נַחֲלָה] (Nm 18:54; 32:18–19; 33:54; 34:2, 13–15; 36:2). When God gives the land to Israel, he gives life. On the other hand, God retains ownership of the land (Wright 1997:522; see Lv 25:23), with the Israelites as his 'aliens' [גֵּרִים] and 'tenants' [תוֹשָׁבִים] (Lv 25:23, 35, 47, etc.).[46] Therefore, the land may not be sold permanently (Lv 25:23).

The Mosaic laws contain various restrictions to prevent the land (inheritance) of a specific tribe, clan, or family, from being alienated and added to the possessions of another tribe, clan or family. Examples are the provisions

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44. HALOT, 15, אֲדָמָה, 1; DBL-H, 141 (1); Grisanti (1997a:270).

45. HALOT, 1307–1308, שָׂדֶה; DBL-H, 8441; Grisanti (1997b:1217–1218).

46. Both the resident 'alien' or 'sojourner' [גֵּר] and 'tenant' [תוֹשָׁב] did not possess land in Israel. The גֵּר enjoyed some protection and could even partake in the festival of Passover provided he was circumcised. The תוֹשָׁב is a גֵּר with less rights (Konkel 1997:837; HALOT, 1712–1713 [תוֹשָׁב]).

regarding marriage of a widow to the brother of a deceased man (the so-called levirate marriage, attested in Genesis 38:1–10, and confirmed in Dt 25:5–10), redemption of land in the Year of Jubilee (Lv 25:11, 24–28) and the inheritance of female heirs (Zelophehad's daughters, Nm 36:1–13). The rationale for these provisions is that land supports *life*. In an agrarian society lack of land signifies deprivation, starvation and death.

An important aspect of land occupation is *security*. Wandering people find it difficult to defend themselves against attacks, while settlers can defend themselves in walled cities. Occupation of land can make all the difference between life and death. The patriarchs dwelt as aliens and tenants among other people. Without the protection of their own clans, they were left defenceless. Their descendants were slaves in Egypt (Ex 13:2, 14; 20:2; Lv 26:13) and as such also aliens (Gn 15:13; Ex 23:9). In Leviticus, God warns the Israelites regarding what will happen when they are disobedient. One of the curses is that they will be scattered among the nations (Lv 26:33). A situation of despair and death is envisaged. Without their own land God's people will again be without security, and thus exposed to the whims of their enemies.

■ Communion

It is hard to imagine life without meaningful relationships. To be isolated from other human beings, and especially to be estranged from God, is an experience akin to death.

The patriarchs found their full identity within the larger family, especially their ancestors and descendants. The same applies to individuals in Israel. They found their identity within the Israelite nation, the tribal system and the clan. Both Achan and Saul were identified with reference to a specific tribe [שֵׁבֶט] and clan [מִשְׁפָּחָה], and finally the family or household [בֵּית אָב] (Jos 7:16–18; 1 Sm 10:20).

Serious transgressions of the Mosaic laws incurred the death penalty (e.g. Ex 21:12; Lv 20:1–5; 24:16), while other major transgressions required that the living being [הַנֶּפֶשׁ] be cut off (ni of כרת) from the community (e.g. Ex 31:14; Lv 7:21; Nm 9:13). Exclusion from the community spells death as the individual's life-sustaining roots are cut off. The person is denied the fullness of community life and even access to some life-sustaining resources. An outsider is a living dead.

Life is primarily linked to close communion with *God* as the Giver of life. Fellowship with God is described in various ways in Genesis 12 to Numbers 36:[47]

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47. These descriptions are also reflected in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, along with other terms like ידע [*know*] and דַּעַת [*knowledge*] (see: Vriezen 1996:191).

- **Walk:** As Enoch walked with God (Gn 5:22, 24), so did Abraham and Isaac. They '*walked*' (hitp of [הלך]) *before* [לְפְנֵי] God (Gn 17:1; 24:40; 28:15). God promised that he will 'walk in the midst' of his people (Lv 26:12).
- **Countenance:** A life full of blessing is a life where God turns his face towards his people (Lv 26:9). If God turns his face away from his people (Lv 26:17), it results in death or death-like circumstances. God spoke to Moses *face to face* (Ex 22:11). God's face is tantamount to his presence (HALOT, 940–941 [פָּנִים, C]; DBLH, 7156 [פָּנִים, 5]). To come before the Lord (לִפְנֵי יְהוָה) is to approach his presence (e.g. Ex 34:34; Nm 8:10). His face [פָּנִים] is his benevolent presence, his favour (see Ex 33:14–15). In the priestly blessing, God will '*make his face shine*' upon the blessed (Nm 6:25) and will '*lift his face*' (Nm 6:26).
- **Dwelling:** Communion with God is also described as God dwelling (the verb שׁכן) or having his dwelling place [מִשְׁכָּן] among his *people* (Ex 29:45–46; Lv 26:11; Nm 35:34), specifically in the *camp* (Nm 5:3) and more specifically in the *tent sanctuary* (Ex 25:8). The tent sanctuary (tabernacle) was also called the 'tent of meeting' [אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד], because there God met with his people. Before the tabernacle was constructed, God met with Moses in a temporary tent outside the camp (Ex 33:7, 9) when the people had broken communion with God (Ex 33:3).
- **Belonging:** Communion between God and his people is best described as mutual belonging: He is our God (Lv 26:12) and we are his very own people (Lv 26:12; Ex 6:6; 19:5–6; 29:45–46).

Communion is more than merely God's presence. His presence in anger would bring death to the people (Ex 33:5). Moses pleaded with God to accompany Israel with his *benevolent* presence. The implication is that they would perish without God's presence [פָּנִים] coming with them (Ex 33:14–16).

■ Fertility

Fertility is both an attribute of life and a precondition for the continuation of life.

Genesis 12 to Numbers 36 contains four genealogies,[48] which confirm the rule of life, namely that humankind as living beings procreate. The genealogies are specifically those of the patriarchs and their close family. On the other hand, the narratives in which the genealogies are embedded bear witness of barrenness. The survival of God's chosen family, and later God's chosen people, is put in jeopardy when somebody cannot conceive. Not only are the promises given to the family and the nation at stake, but barrenness also implies the death of a family. Without fertility, a particular family will cease

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48. Genesis 22:20–24, 25:12–18, 36:1–31, 46:8–25. The census at the beginning of Numbers (Nm 1–4) and at the end of Numbers (Nm 26) contain names, but is not regarded as genealogies.

to exist. If there is no male descendant, the notion is that a person's name will disappear from his clan (Nm 27:4).

A considerable number of *laws* in Leviticus and Numbers deal with fertility, procreation and sexual matters, for example:

- purification after childbirth (Lv 12:1–8)
- bodily discharges (Lv 15:1–32; Nm 5:2)
- unlawful sexual relations, adultery and immorality (Lv 18:6–23; 20:10–21; Nm 5:11–29)
- sexual relations with a female slave (Lv 19:20–22)
- prostitution (Lv 19:29–30)
- child sacrifice (Lv 20:1–5).

Laws relating to adultery, immorality and child sacrifice stipulate those offenders must be put to *death* (Lv 20:1–5, 10–20). Sexual immorality is often associated with fertility revelries. Two incidents, one at the beginning of the sojourn in the wilderness and one towards the end serve as examples where sexual immorality, with some idol worship implied, incurred a form of death penalty:

- At Sinai, the people urged Aaron to make a golden calf. They brought burnt offerings and peace offerings in front of the calf and indulged in revelry.[49] On account of this, God wanted to kill all the people and make Moses a great nation (Ex 32:9–10). That would bring the promise to the patriarchs about descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, into disrepute before the nations (Ex 32:13). Eventually, 3000 people were killed at the hands of the Levites (Ex 32:28).
- At Shittim the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women in the context of sacrificial meals of idol worship (Nm 25:1–3). The text is not clear as to what exactly happened, because different outcomes are mentioned.[50] Eventually, the priest Phinehas killed an Israelite man and the daughter of a Midianite leader. He killed them with a spear while they were engaging in illicit sex (Nm 25:6–8, 14–15).

From the sexual laws and the two incidents we learn that purity in matters of fertility and procreation is depicted as a matter of life and death.

■ Theological trajectories

In Chapter 2, three main trajectories related to life are both presented and applied to Genesis 1–11. In this section, these trajectories are discussed with

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49. Exodus 32:6. The pi of צחק is used for physical sexual play (DBL-H, 7464).

50. God told Moses to hang all the leaders of the people (Nm 25:4). Moses told the judges that each of them must kill those of his men who have joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor (Nm 25:5). God sent a plague that killed 24 000 Israelites (Nm 25:9, 18).

regard to Genesis 12 to Numbers 36. The three trajectories are: creation, procreation and recreation.

◼ Life in creation

Genesis 12 to Numbers 36 expands on the theme of creational life, introduced in the first 11 chapters of Genesis. Creational life is life that springs from no-life, that is, where life has never existed before. God is the *source* of creational life, the *owner* of creational life and the *sustainer* of creational life.

☐ Source of life

God is explicitly depicted in Genesis 1–11 as the source of all life, especially in the first two chapters. In Genesis 12 to Numbers 36 there is no indication that God continued to create living things or that other agents can effect life. God, as the sole source of life, created in the beginning.[51] Henceforth, God would give life though *procreation* and *recreation* (see the sections titled 'Life in procreation' and 'Life in recreation').

☐ Owner of life

In Genesis 11 to Numbers 36 God is depicted as the owner of life. He may require that human life be taken in instances of adultery, immorality and child sacrifice (see the section titled 'Fertility'). Stipulations regarding unnatural death in the Mosaic Law are based on the premise that human life is sacrosanct and that killing a human being is thus an offense against God as the owner of life. If such a killing is homicide, namely when it is unpremeditated, then reparations have to be made (Ex 21:13; Nm 35:15, 22–25). If it is murder (intentional killing) the culprit has to be killed (capital punishment) (Ex 21:12, 14; Nm 35:16–21). An animal that kills a human can be held responsible along with its owner (Ex 21:28–32).

As God is the owner of life, he not only decides whether humans may eat the flesh of other living beings (see Gn 9:3), but also stipulates which animals may be eaten (Lv 11).

☐ Sustainer of life

As with the universal history of Genesis 1–11, the grand narrative of Genesis 12 to Numbers 36 becomes a narrative about life frustrated in death.

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51. The frogs, gnats, flies and locusts of the plagues in Egypt were apparently made by God as it seemed as if they appeared from nowhere. However, the way that God performed these miracles suggests that God used extraordinary multiplication of existing living species to effect these plagues (Ex 8: 5, 16; 10:12). The frogs, gnats, flies and locusts were not necessarily novel creations.

In Genesis the deaths of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, are explicitly stated (Gn 25:8; 35:29; 49:33). We read of many more deaths. In Genesis 36, the refrain 'and he died' [וַיָּמׇת] is used seven times regarding Esau's descendants. It is said of Ishmael (Gn 25:17), Rachel (Gn 35:19) and Joseph (Gn 50:36). The death of Joseph is the final account of the book. Genesis, the book of births, becomes the book of deaths.

We read of various groups of people whom God killed during the sojourn in the wilderness (Ex 32:28; Nm 11:1, 33; 16:31–35; 21:6). Eventually, a whole generation of Israelites perished in the wilderness (Nm 14:21–23; 32:10–12). Death comes when God decides that life be terminated. Death is not depicted as a reality or force apart from God.

In spite of death in all its forms, God sustained the life of his people. He is the sustainer of life regardless of oppression (Gn 15:13; Ex 3:9; 20:1), despite the lack of life-giving water (see the section titled 'Water') and food (see the section titled 'Food') and land (see the section titled 'Land').

◼ Life in procreation

A second major trajectory related to life is procreation, that is when God allows existent living entities to reproduce themselves. Life in procreation is life out of life. Whereas God does not create new things according to Genesis 12 to Numbers 36, he makes sure that life is replicated, especially the life of the patriarchs (his chosen family) and Israel (his chosen people).

▢ Procreation in own likeness

Humans procreate after their own kind, their own image and likeness (see Gn 5:3), which sets procreation apart from mere fertility. In Genesis 12 to Numbers 36 it becomes clear that human procreation involves more than mere multiplication.

Descendants (usually collectively) are metaphorically called the seed [זֶרַע] (already in Gn 3:15, but also in Gn 12:9; 13:15–16, etc.). Offspring are the seeds planted by parents, and nurtured by parents or foster parents.

The promise and fulfilment of seed is very central to the patriarchal history, where it is foreseen that the seed would become a great nation (Gn 13:16; 15:5; 17:7–10; 22:17).

Human procreation transmits more than mere inborn traits:

- *Humans* themselves transmit names, culture and land. Unlike animals, parents name their children, whose names are important to be remembered and to be included in a genealogy. Human offspring learn specific languages and cultures from their parents, and inherit land.

- *God* visits iniquity of the fathers on the children 'through generations' (Ex 20:5; Nm 14:18). God also transfers his promises to the seed of the beneficiaries of his promises (Gn 17:7; Ex 20:6).[52]

□ Sustainer of procreation

From Genesis 12 onward we learn that life in procreation is constantly under threat. Most of the patriarchal history centres on the struggle for the fulfilment of the seed promise.

The quest for an offspring starts with an elderly couple, Abraham and Sarah,[53] who were barren. Abraham took along his nephew Lot probably to compensate for the fact that they as an elderly couple had no descendants to care for them in future, inherit their possessions and perpetuate the family (Hamilton 1990:376). This plan did not succeed and eventually Abraham and Lot separated (Gn 13:1–11). Abraham then considered Eliezer of Damascus, the servant of his household, as his heir because he saw no fulfilment of God's seed promise. He reminded God that he had not given him children (Gn 15:2–3). God explicitly precluded this possibility (Gn 15:4). In an effort to fulfil the promise of the seed on his own, Abraham then took Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian maidservant and begot a child (Gn 16:1–4). When God appeared to Abraham once again to confirm the seed promise (Gn 17:1–8) and indicated that he would fulfil it through Sarah, although she was past child-bearing age (Gn 17:15–17), Abraham still maintained that Hagar's son would be the heir: 'Oh, that Ishmael might live before you!' (Gn 17:18). God wanted to fulfil the promise of the seed as if out of a situation of death (see also Rm 4:19). In a narrative about Abraham and Abimelech, it is confirmed that God is the God of procreation. He opens the womb, and he closes the womb (Gn 20:17–18). The eventual birth of Isaac is depicted in the Biblical text as a wonder (Gn 18:13–14; 21:1–2). The birth of Isaac is similar to the creation of life out of death.

The quest for an heir reverberates in the story of Isaac. He was 40 years old when he took Rebekah to be his wife. He prayed to God because his wife was barren (Gn 25:21). This time God did not delay the fulfilment of the seed promise. Twins, Jacob and Esau, were born – but only these two. The fulfilment of a multitude of descendants was still unsettled in the patriarchal history.

Central to the Jacob story stand two shorter narratives about fertility: One about fertility in Jacob's house and the other about fertility in Jacob's flocks (Gn 29:31–30:22; 30:25–43). Together, these shorter narratives give evidence

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52. The words of Exodus 20:6, 'showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments', have a bearing on thousands of *generations* in the immediate context (Waltke 2007:418).

53. Although their names were changed to Abraham and Sarah only later in the narrative, only these names are used in the present discussion.

of God's favour to Jacob and of life in abundance. However, the fulfilment of the seed promise was not without problems. The reader is reminded that the beloved wife of Jacob, Rachel, was barren (Gn 29:31). This led to the so-called birth contest with Leah, filled with heartbreak and bitterness. The text emphasises that, when she eventually conceived, is was because God listened to her and opened her womb (Gn 30:22). God is the one who gives life through procreation and he alone. In procreation death is constantly lurking. This is emphasised by the fact that Rachel died during the birth of her second son (Gn 35:16–19).

Although Jacob's family expanded into a clan, they were still in danger of being wiped out. The rest of the patriarchal narrative centres on the theme of life sustained in the face of death:

- Firstly, Jacob's encounter with his brother Esau. Jacob had to face his brother Esau who was on his way to meet him along with 400 men. Jacob feared revenge from his brother. In a surprising turn, Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him. The lives of Jacob and his family were spared (Gn 32:1–33:17).
- Secondly, Simeon and Levi and the Schechemites. The sons of Jacob raided the city of Shechem, killing Hamor, the Hivite ruler and his son Shechem. Genesis 34, where this incident is related, is a strange chapter in Genesis that seems like a digression in the patriarchal narrative. However, the main point of the story is to illustrate how precarious the position of Jacob and his clan was, as articulated by Jacob: 'We are but few in number. The people living in the land may attack us and destroy everybody in the household' (Gn 34:30). Miraculously, God protected the whole clan of Jacob from extermination.
- Thirdly, the famine that threatened the whole clan. The gist of the whole Joseph story is (in the words of Joseph) that God intended to 'keep alive many people' (Gn 50:20). Once again God is depicted as the sustainer of procreation by saving Jacob's descendants from death.

Apart from the fact that the heirs to the promise were in danger of being stamped out, ideal procreation where parents instil a godly life in their seed, also failed, as with Esau (Gn 26:34). Many of the patriarchal heirs, such as Ishmael, Esau and some of Jacob's sons, did not live up to God's promises and plans for his own people. The reader of the narrative is kept in suspense as to whether that would be the end of the godly lineage.

Exodus and Numbers tells about the establishment of God's people as a holy nation and a kingdom of priests (Ex 19:6). Central to the narrative are God's deeds of sustaining the procreation of his people:

- The book of Exodus starts by confirming that the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly (Ex 1:7). The author echoes the creational mandate of Genesis 1:28–29 (Currid 2016a:52) and the recreational

mandate of Genesis 9. But just as we as readers assume that the seed promise was fulfilled, we read about Pharaoh's oppression. Through hard labour and the murder of the Israelite baby boys, Pharaoh wanted to restrict their numbers (Ex 1:16, 22). This did not pay off. The Israelites still multiplied (Ex 1:20).

- Israel repeatedly rebelled against God and deserved to be annihilated. However, as the keeper of his promises to the patriarchs God also sustained the seed as heirs of the promises. Twice God contemplated making Moses a great nation (Ex 32:10; Nm 14:12), thus maintaining the seed of the patriarchs through Moses only. When God eventually decided that a whole generation would die in the wilderness, he also allowed that a new generation born in the wilderness, will live to inherit the land of promise.

◼ Life in recreation

A recreational act is when God re-installs his promises and plans through the creation of a new situation, a fresh start. God's recreational acts can also be called his salvic acts, because they give a new lease of life to people who experience a hopeless situation because the course of events led them to a dead end or death itself. Life in recreation is life out of death.

The recreational acts in Genesis 12 through Numbers 36 centre on the establishment of a chosen group of people. Two stages are described, namely the establishment of God's Own Family (Gn 12–50) and God's Own People (Ex 1 to Nm 36). In both stages, God is depicted as the *initiator*, the *promiser*, the *fulfiller* and the *sustainer* of recreation:

☐ The initiator of recreation

Usually God initiates a recreational act by calling or visiting people who are in dire straits. God communicates with the beneficiaries and thus opens communion, which in itself is life-giving (see section titled 'Communion'). God often starts his discourse with a command or a self-revelatory statement.

☐ *God's Own Family*

God decided to set apart a specific family as his beneficiaries among all the nations and thus establish his Own Family. Dumbrell (2013:72) regards Abraham's call 'a calling into existence of a new creation', similar to and in continuity with Genesis 1. As this 'new creation' is out of a situation of despair, one would rather call it a *re*creation.

As a whole, Genesis 1–11 is a story of failure, of 'profound despair as to the prospects for the future of the human race' (Dumbrell 2013:62). The first

human couple transgressed and were expelled from the Garden (Gn 3). The Old Humanity (Gn 4–7) became corrupt and were destroyed by the Flood. The New Humanity (Gn 8–11) were arrogant. They built a city and tower in Shinar, so that God dispersed them. A dead end for God's purposes with mankind seemed inevitable toward the end of Genesis 11.

The last verses of Genesis 11 comprise a transitional section to the Patriarchal Narrative (Gn 12–50). Terah and his family are introduced to the reader. He sat out from Ur of the Chaldeans with his family to Canaan. Most probably they were in search of a better life. Terah and his family only went as far as Haran and settled there (Gn 11:31). Special mention is made of Sarah who was barren, without child (Gn 11:30). This not only sets the stage for what follows, but also underlines a hopeless situation for Abraham and Sarah, because infertility suggests death (see the section titled 'Fertility').

The text gives no indication that Abraham sought after God. Rather, God took the initiative and called him. The calling consisted of a command to break completely with his natural family and familiar surroundings (Gn 12:1). God kept on taking the initiative by appearing and speaking to him (Gn 12:7; 13:14; 15:1; 17:1; 18:1; 22:11ff.). God also appeared and talked to Abraham's son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob (Gn 26:2–5, 24; 28:13–15; 35:1, 9–13, etc.). In some instances, God introduced himself, typically right at the beginning of a discourse (Gn 15:1; 17:1; 26:24; 28:13). This divine initiative established life-giving communion.

☐ *God's Own People*

God's Own Family was destined to become God's treasured possession [סְגֻלָּה] out of all the nations of the earth (Ex 19:5). This possession would be God's Own People, defined as 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex 19:5).

Once again God took the initiative in a situation of death. Although the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob multiplied greatly in Egypt, they became enslaved and were oppressed. The first chapters of Exodus are filled with death-talk. The Egyptians tried to kill all the Hebrew boys at birth (Ex 1:15–16), an Egyptian violently assaulted a Hebrew man (Ex 2:11), Moses killed the Egyptian (Ex 2:12) and Pharaoh sought to kill Moses (Ex 2:15). The Israelites were afflicted with hard work (Ex 1:11, 14), which let them groan and cry out for help (Ex 2:23). This hopeless situation continued for a long time (Ex 2:23), suggesting that there was no solution in sight. More was at stake than the death of baby boys, which impacted on Israel's physical survival. Their identity was at stake. They no longer knew the Lord (Yahweh), their God (Ex 3:13–16). Instead of being the cradle for a new nation, Egypt had become Israel's grave – the place where they would die. Their cry for help was not so

much a petition to the God of Israel. It was more of a general cry of despair [צְעָקָה] (Gn 3:7, 9).[54]

God had to take the initiative to introduce himself to them. So, God raised up a leader, Moses (Ex 2). God appeared to him, talked to him and thus prepared him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex 3:2–4:17). In his self-disclosure to Moses and later to the elders, God emphasises life:

- He is the God of the living, because he introduces himself as the God of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as if they were still relevant and living (Ex 3:6; Ex 13, 15–16). He is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Mt 22:32; Mk 12:27). He is not merely a force, but a person who had a personal connection with the patriarchs and who, by implication wanted to have the same relationship with their descendants.
- His name (YHWH) is linked in the text to אֶהְיֶה [I AM], more fully explained by the nominal sentence אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה [I AM WHO I AM] (Ex 3:14). The latter can be translated as 'I shall be who I shall prove to be' (HALOT, 244 [הָיָה, 3c]). This not only suggests that he exists in absolute sense (DBLH, 2118 [הָיָה, 3]; Waltke 2007:366), but also that he is the active and living reality that can and will change the destiny of his people (Dumbrell 2013:112). The word אֶהְיֶה [I AM] is similar to the promise אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ [I will be with you] (Ex 3:12; see also Gn 26:3; 31:3; Jos 1:5; 3:7; Jdg 6:16) by which God comforts his beneficiaries with his active presence. This confirms that his name is his 'active, creative, constant, approachable presence in actual human history' (House 1998:94). He does not exist in a passive sense, but in his actuality, his life-giving presence (Helberg 1996:81–82; Vriezen 1966:195–196).

God's self-revelation to Moses underscores the fact that he is the sole source and agent of recreation, of new life to people who virtually ceased to be the people of God.

☐ The promise-giver of recreation

A second aspect of life in recreation, is that God is the promise-giver of recreation. The act of communication whereby God initiates communion (see the last section titled 'The initiator of recreation') contains or leads to specific promises to the beneficiaries. These promises are meant to be owned and believed, even when they are unconditionally stated. The promises are also intended to change the behaviour of the recipients. Promises thus bring new life to the recipients by recreating their outlook as well as their conduct.

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54. Although HALOT, 1042 (צְעָקָה, 2) distinguishes a 'yell, call for help [...] addressed directly of indirectly to God', no mention is made in the text of Exodus 3 that the petition was directed to God. The meaning 'yelling, screaming from despair, need or unhappiness' (HALOT, 1042 (צְעָקָה, 1) is more appropriate in this context. DBLH, 7591 (צְעָקָה) only mentions the latter meaning.

The promises are usually applicable to the descendants of the beneficiary as well, so that new life has an impact on generations to come.[55]

☐ *God's Own Family*

God made promises to Abraham, and later repeated these promises to the other patriarchs. Five promises were made when God called Abraham (Gn 12:2–3):

1. 'I will make of you a great nation.'
2. 'I will bless you.'
3. 'I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.'
4. 'I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse.'
5. 'All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

Two promises were later added:

6. 'To your offspring I will give this land' (Gn 12:7).

7. 'Kings shall come from you' (Gn 17:16).

Many of these promises to Abraham were later explicitly confirmed to Isaac and Jacob (e.g. Gn 26:3–4, 24; 28:13–15; 35:11–12).

Life that transcends mere existence was implied in these. Their seed will possess the land (Gn 12:7; 13:14–15; 15:7; 17:8; 22:16–17, etc.) and they will be blessed to such an extent, that blessings will overflow to others around them (Gn 12:2b–3) and even to all the nations of the earth (Gn 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4). God promised not merely that he would sustain procreation (see section titled 'Sustainer of procreation'), but that he would bring new and meaningful life.

Abraham accepted God's promises. He sat out for the land of promise (Gn 12:5–6) and worshipped God (Gn 12:7–8). His faith in God was 'counted to him as righteousness' (Gn 15:6), which is indicative of a profound change in Abraham's life. The first promise particularly required that he would believe in God's life-giving power (see section titled 'Sustainer of procreation').

☐ *God's Own People*

God is also the promise-giver as he transformed a group of Hebrew slaves in Egypt into his Own People:

- The first promise was that God would set them free (Ex 3:2–3a, 10–12; 6:4–6). This was the exodus promise.

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55. See Genesis 17:9 ('in their generations' [לְדֹרֹתָם]), and Exodus 3:15 ('from generation to generation' [לְדֹר דֹר]). The latter expression or similar expressions abound in die Psalter (e.g. Ps 45:17; 72:5; 89:1; 90:1; 100:5; 102:12; 146:10).

- A second promise, intertwined with the first promise, was actually the confirmation of a promise already made to the patriarchs, namely that he would give them their own land. This was the promise of the land conquest (Ex 3:3b; 17; 6:3, 7).

Moses initially hesitated (Ex 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10) but eventually did what God asked him to do (see Ex 7:6). The Israelites initially believed God's promises (Ex 4:31), but later doubted and offered resistance (Ex 5:21; 6:8).

God let Moses perform miracles and sent the plagues, not only as a message to the Pharaoh and his people (Ex 3:20; 5:24; 7:3–5, 9–13, 14, etc.), but also to reassure the Israelites that he would set them free (Ex 4:29–31). In a deed of decreation, God symbolically reversed creation through the plagues, specifically as it pertains to the land of Egypt (Currid 2016b:78–79). At the same time the plagues confirmed God's promise of recreation to Israel. Before the tenth plague the Passover was instituted (Ex 2:1ff.). The Passover is a sign of deliverance signifying life (for God's beneficiaries) in spite of death (of God's enemies) (Ex 11:5, 7; 12:7, 12–13; 26–27).

The people of Israel did as Moses and Aaron had commanded regarding the celebration of Passover (Ex 12:28). After Pharaoh had then chased away the Israelites (Ex 12:31–32), they obeyed God's command by preparing for the exodus (Ex 12:34–39). God's promises brought new life to Moses and the Israelites.

◻ The fulfiller of recreation

God fulfils his promises, thereby fulfilling recreation. God brings about a new situation, a new order, which is not merely the consequence of preceding events. A new order rests on its antecedents, but also represents an unexpected turn of events. Life is recreated for the beneficiaries, but not newly created as with life in creation (see section titled 'Life in creation').

Often the new situation is confirmed by one or more signs and a code of conduct for the beneficiaries.

The Old and New Testaments attest various new orders, implying that none of the recreational acts are final. All of them open expectations of something more, something greater.

◻ *God's Own Family*

Promises 5 and 7 (see numbering in the earlier section, 'The promise-giver of recreation') fall outside the scope of the Genesis 12 to Numbers 36. Promises 2, 3 and 4 had an immediate effect on the patriarchs themselves, changing the lives of the patriarchs and even people associated with them.

Promises 1 and 6 (respectively the promises of the seed and the land) dominate the patriarchal narrative of Genesis 12–50. God specifically guaranteed these two promises by means of a covenant (Gn 15:18). The ceremony associated with the institution of the covenant in Genesis 15, whereby a smoking oven and burning torch pass between the two halves of a heifer, goat, ram and goat (Gn 15:9, 17), served as a reminder that adherence to the covenant is a matter of life and death. God also confirmed this covenant by introducing circumcision as a sign of the covenant (Gn 17:10–14).

No specific statutes or rules were given for the new relationship between God and Abraham's lineage, except the general injunction: 'Walk before me and be blameless' (Gn 17:1).

The patriarchal history is open-ended, evidenced by the last chapter of Genesis. At the end of Genesis we find the promise of a great nation partially fulfilled in a large clan, but the promise of the land still unfulfilled. The fact that Abraham is buried in Canaan (Gn 50:13) and Joseph wants to be reburied in Canaan (Gn 50:25) opens up a glimmer of hope.

☐ *God's Own People*

The Israelites did not really want to be set free (Ex 14:11–12). Deliverance from the slavery in Egypt was entirely the result of God's initiative, who carried them on eagles' wings and brought them to himself (Ex 19:4). He is the one who brought them out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery with a mighty hand (Ex 13:3, 14; 20:1). God was not merely a helper for people who tried to escape by themselves.

God personally led the Israelites out of Egypt (Ex 13:17–18, 21–22; 20:2) and parted the Sea of Reeds to make a passage for them (Ex 14:21). As they were being pursued by the Egyptian army (Ex 14:23) who then drowned (Ex 14:27–28), they received a new lease of life from God. This is tantamount to a recreational act, with clear echoes of Genesis 1:9–10 where God divides the waters, brings forth the land and then supplies resources to sustain his people (Currid 2016a:52, 2016b:78).

When God closed the waters of the Sea of Reeds behind Israel, he was affirming their new life and that they could not simply return to their previous situation in Egypt. In the wilderness God transformed this group of Hebrew slaves into his own people (Ex 19:4–6). At Sinai God entered into a covenant with them and gave them his statutes. He indicated that the Sabbath would be the covenantal sign (Ex 31:16–17).

The promise of land conquest was still unfulfilled when the Israelites arrived at Sinai. Fulfilment of the land promise was further deferred because of the revolt of the people as narrated in Numbers 14. The book of Numbers closes

with the expectation that the land promise is about to be fulfilled. Not only does the text emphasise that God spoke to them on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho (Nm 35:1; 36:13), but specific provisions are given for life in the land: Boundaries of the land (Nm 34:1–15), towns to be given to the Levites in the land (Nm 35:1–5), cities of refuge in the land (Nm 35:6–33) and inheritance laws regarding female heirs in the land (Nm 36:1–12).

The recreational act of God establishing a kingdom of priests would only be finished after the land conquest, after the dark period of the judges, when the institutions of the priesthood and monarchy were established. In this respect, the end of the book Numbers is open-ended.

☐ The sustainer of recreation

A fourth aspect of life in recreation, is that God is the sustainer of recreation. This aspect must be distinguished from other modes whereby God preserves life. When he sustains life in creation (see section titled 'Sustainer of life'), he lets natural life continue in the face of death. When he sustains life in procreation (see section titled 'Sustainer of procreation'), he preserves natural life in the face of infertility. However, when he sustains recreation (see section titled 'Sustainer of recreation'), he confirms, extends and protects a new order of life in the face of the rebellion and unfaithfulness of the beneficiaries. He upholds a specific stage in his recreational programme for humankind.

When God *initiates* a next recreational act (see the section titled 'The initiator of recreation'), there is a far-reaching readjustment in the way that he deals with beneficiaries. The *sustainment* of recreation is not as novel and extensive. When God sustains life in recreation, he upholds an existent recreational act.

☐ *God's Own Family*

Accepting God's promises and living according to it, was not a simple once-off matter to Abraham, nor to his descendants, Isaac, Jacob and the sons of Jacob. The text tells how Abraham wrestled with God's promise of an offspring that seemed impossible and did not materialise (Gn 15:2; 16:1; 17:17). Abraham made alternative plans (Gn 15:3: 16:2; 17:18, 19), but each time God reaffirmed his promises (Gn 15:4; 17:16; 18:10 – see also the section titled 'Sustainer of procreation').

Abraham even stood in the way of God's plan when he twice denied that Sarah was his wife (Gn 12:13; 20:2) – something that happened a third time when Isaac denied that Rebecca was his wife (Gn 26:7). Jacob and his sons also did not always live according to God's promises (e.g. Gn 25:31–34; 27:18–27; 34:25–29; 37:20–33; 38:24–26; 49:3–5). Each time God sustained his plans with the patriarchs.

Towards the end of the patriarchal narrative, the focus gradually shifts to Joseph and Judah and their descendants. Both genealogical lines were in danger. Joseph was sold as a slave (Gn 37:28, 36) and Judah's sons died one after the other without progeny (Gn 38:7–11). Both Joseph and Judah were blessed in their progeny (Gn 38:29–30; 46:12, 20; 48:5–20). God sustained his recreational plan by turning evil into good and saving many lives (Gn 50:20).

☐ *God's Own People*

The Israelites resisted God's promise of exodus, when they complained at Pi Hahirot at the Sea of Reeds. They wanted to return to Egypt and serve the Egyptians (Ex 12:11–12). They did this out of fear for the army of Pharaoh who came after them. God sustained his plan of deliverance in spite of their rebellion by checking the advance of the Egyptians (Ex 14:19–20), by making a way for Israel through the sea (Ex 14:21–22), by letting the Egyptian chariots get stuck in the seabed (Ex 14:23–25) and eventually by letting the Egyptian soldiers drown in the sea (Ex 14:26–29). It is specifically stated that the people then believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses (Ex 4:31).

Israel's journey to Canaan is a story of recurrent rebellion. They wanted to undo God's recreational act. Ten incidents are mentioned where Israel during the sojourn in the wilderness tried to obstruct the fulfilment of God's promises: At Marah in the wilderness of Shur (Ex 15:22), in the wilderness of Sin (Ex 16:2), at Rephidim (Ex 17:2–3), at Sinai (the incident with the golden Calf – Ex 32:1), at Taberah (Nm 11:1), at Kibroth-Hattaavah (Nm 11:4), at Kadesh (Nm 14:1–2), at an undisclosed place (Korah, Dathan and Abiram and the entire community – Nm 16:1–3, 41), at the waters of Meribah (Nm 20:3) and near Edom (Nm 21:5).

God reacted in his anger after each of these rebellions, but also showed his mercy by sustaining his recreational act. Twice God wanted to kill everybody and make Moses into a new nation (Ex 32:10; Nm 14:11–12). However, God sustained his recreational agenda in his steadfast love and faithfulness (Ex 34:6–7; Nm 14:18–19). He reaffirmed life when death was justified.

Most of the reaffirmations of this recreational act (God creating a kingdom of priests), which are encapsulated in the Sinaitic covenant, occur outside the text under discussion (Genesis 12 to Numbers 36). Some of these are worth mentioning:

• After the demise of the rebellious generation in the wilderness, God sustained his recreated order before the conquest of the land (Dt 27:1–13; cf. Jos 5:2–12). The passage through the Jordan confirms God's recreational act, again with allusions Genesis 1 and 2, where God divided the waters and settled people in a bountiful land (Currid 2016a:52).
• At the end of Joshua's life, Israel is once again affirmed as God's own People (Jos 24:1–27). This happens in light of the impending apostasy

(Jos 24:19–24; 31). In terms of covenantal theology these reaffirmations can be called the renewal of the Mosaic (or Sinaitic) Covenant.

- In the time of the judges God had to reaffirm his agenda from time to time in situations of apostasy, hopelessness and ruin.
- In a special way, God also sustained Israel as recreated humanity, namely by the establishment of a particular priesthood and the kingship for his people. The binding oaths (בְּרִית)[56] with the priestly line of Phinehas (Nm 25:9) and the royal line of David (Ps 89:3; Jer 33:21; see 2 Sm 7) are not in the strict sense covenants or new recreational acts, but elaborations on the establishment of his 'kingdom of priests', his 'holy nation' (Ex 19:5).

■ Conclusion

A theology of life may be congruent to other cross-section approaches, which take pivotal themes or conceptual centres in the Old Testament (or Bible) as organising principles for an Old Testament (or Biblical) theology. A comparison to all such thematic approaches is beyond the scope of this book, but in conclusion a theology of life is briefly compared to three of these approaches:

- **Covenant:**[57] A major point of critique regarding a covenantal approach is that it is hard to prove that the covenant concept functions as a major theme outside narrative texts, certain psalms and the latter prophets. It is hard to prove that the covenant functions as a theme in wisdom texts and most of the legal texts (Steinberg 2013:34; see also the scope of articles in eds. Waters et al. 2020), although exponents of covenantal theology argue that God's covenants are presupposed throughout the Hebrew Bible and that they actually 'structure Scripture' (Robertson 1980:203). In contrast, trajectories of life are prominent in a variety of Old Testament text types, as demonstrated in the present chapter (see the main section titled 'Theological trajectories'). Moreover, references to life (see ch. 2) and preconditions for life (see the main section titled 'Preconditions of life') are rife throughout the Hebrew Bible, supporting the relevance of life as a major and valid Biblical theme. A second objection against covenantal theology is that the New Testament is not as explicit when it comes to the covenant as the Old Testament, whereas life as a concept is prominent both in the Old and New Testaments. A third shortcoming of classical

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56. There are instances in the Hebrew Bible where the word בְּרִית can hardly mean a 'covenant or contract', such as God's בְּרִית with the animals (Hos 2:17 [2:20 MT]) and a human's בְּרִית with the stones of the fields (Job 5:23). In Genesis 9 God's בְּרִית is with the earth [הָאָרֶץ] (Gn 9:13), which includes everything that lives [כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ] on earth (Gn 9:10, 12, 15–16), also indicated as 'all flesh' [כָּל־בָּשָׂר] (Gn 9:11, 15–17). The word בְּרִית can also mean a 'binding oath or promise' (DBL-H, 1382b) or 'a solemn commitment [...] to undertake an obligation' (Waltke 2007:287).

57. E.g. Eichrodt (1933, 1961 printing); Robertson (1980) and Dumbrell (2013). Although not so restrictive as classical covenantal theology, Kaiser's 'promise plan' (1978, 2008:31) is essentially a covenantal approach.

covenantal theology is that it tends to become a straitjacket. Although the term 'covenant' [בְּרִית] is not used before Genesis 6:19, a covenant of creation and covenant of grace with Adam is assumed (Robertson 1980:17–25; 67; 91), which goes 'beyond the exegetically derived covenants' (Kaiser 2008:26). On the other hand, the occurrence of the word בְּרִית in a Biblical text does warrant that the text deals with a covenant.[58] It can be argued that the word בְּרִית in Genesis 9:9–13 does not refer to a covenant, because many of the typical traits of a covenant lacks. The grand narrative of God's unfolding plan of redemption can more naturally be described in terms of recreational acts. Some recreational acts are at the same biblical covenants, as with the two recreational acts discussed in this chapter (see section titled 'Life in recreation').

- **Communion:**[59] God's benevolent presence is a precondition of life and can be regarded as a metaphor for life itself. To know God, to walk with God, to belong to God and similar expressions are used to indicate life in its fullness (see section titled 'Communion'). Still, life is a more comprehensive concept than communion. Life includes forms of life (and death) in creation (see section titled 'Life in creation') and procreation (see section titled 'Life in procreation') that does not necessarily imply a personal relationship between God and humankind. The unfolding plan of God according to the grand narrative of the Hebrew Bible can more readily be described in terms of a theology of life, specifically the trajectory of life in recreation (see section titled 'Life in recreation').

- **Kingdom of God (e.g. Helberg 1996:6–14; Waltke 2007:144–147, 167–168, 305):** In more than one respect, the kingdom of God is a comprehensive theme in the Bible. It can be traced in all kinds of text types. It includes protology (creation) and eschatology. It relates to God's chosen, all human beings, all living and even the inanimate creation. However, the concept of God's kingdom ([מַמְלָכָת], [βασιλεία]) is not as pronounced in the Old Testament as in the New Testament,[60] although there are numerous allusions and references to God being king (מֶלֶךְ) and God reigning as king (qal מלך), especially in poetic and prophetic texts.[61] This poses a major point of critique against the notion that God's kingdom is the dominant or overarching theme in the Hebrew Bible. However, if God's kingdom is defined as his life-giving dominion by means of personal fellowship with man as Helberg (1996:9–10)

58. See footnote 13.

59. E.g.: Vriezen (1996:10, 191–192), as well as Walton (2017:26–28) who takes God's presence as a central theme.

60. The word מַמְלָכָת is used with reference to God who reigns mainly in the book of Psalms and books written after the exile (Ps 22:28, 45:6, 145:12; 1 Chr 17:14; 2 Chr 2:12; Dan 7:14, etc). However there are references like Exodus 19:6 and 2 Kings 19:15 that may also allude that the kingdom belongs to God.

61. For example, Numbers 23:21; Deuteronomy 33:5; Psalms 44:4; 47:6; 74:12; 84:3; 93:1, 95:3; 97:1; 146:10; Isaiah 6:5; 33:22; 44:6; Jeremiah 8:19; 46:18; Malachi 1:14; also 1 Samuel 12:13.

does, this theme resembles the theme of life. Probably God reigning as king should be seen as one of the metaphors or preconditions for life (see the main section 'Preconditions of life'), which can be covered in a theology of life.

Positing a single theme or centre to the Old Testament or the Bible as a whole is problematic (Hasel 1991:47–60, 145, 165–168). However, there are a number of supplementary main themes or longitudinal perspectives, which Hasel calls a 'multitrack treatment' (Hasel 1991:59; see also Koorevaar & Steinberg 2013:52). With that in mind, the conclusion of the first two chapters of this book is that a theology of life is one of the major longitudinal themes, not only in Genesis to Numbers, but also in the rest of the Old and/or New Testament. Life is a comprehensive theme, even more than the themes of covenant, communion and kingdom.

Life in the Pentateuch (3): The employment of the concept of life in Deuteronomy

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■ Introduction[62]

This chapter concludes the tripartite discussion of the concept of life in the Pentateuch by investigating the concept of life in Deuteronomy. Strikingly, except for the article by Markl (2014:71–96), very few surveys of the concept of life in Deuteronomy have been published. The current chapter aims to partially fill this lacuna by giving an overview of the employment of the concept of life in Deuteronomy.

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62. This chapter represents a substantial reworking (more than 50%) of the article 'YHWH and Israel in terms of the concept of life in Deuteronomy' in *Old Testament Essays* 32/1 (Coetsee 2019):101–126. The reworked chapter obtains innovative new knowledge contributing to the theme of the current collected work.

Working with the final form of the book in Hebrew, the chapter starts with a brief overview of occurrences of the concept of life in Deuteronomy and a discussion of focal points of the concept in the book. This is followed by a discussion of key employments of the concept of life in Deuteronomy, namely physical life, lifespan, the living God, wild animals and especially the source of life. Penultimately, the chapter indicates what the concept of life in Deuteronomy in toto reveals about YHWH and Israel. The chapter concludes by briefly reflecting on Deuteronomy's unique employment of the concept of life in the Pentateuch.

■ Occurrences of life in Deuteronomy

The root חיה ('live', 'life') is found 39 times in Deuteronomy (cf. Gerleman 1997:413; Markl 2014:72; Willis 1973:148). These 39 occurrences of the root are found in the form of the verb חָיָה ('live'; 18x: Dt 4:1, 33, 42; 5:24, 26, 33; 6:24; 8:1, 3[2]; 16:20; 19:4, 5; 20:16; 30:16, 19; 32:39; 33:6), the adjective חַי ('alive'; 8x: Dt 4:4, 10; 5:3, 26; 12:1; 31:13, 27; 32:40) and the nouns חַיִּים ('life'; 12x: Dt 4:9; 6:2; 16:3; 17:19; 28:66[2]; 30:6, 15, 19[2], 20; 32:47) and חַיָּה ('living thing'; 1x: Dt 7:22).

An investigation of the distribution of the root throughout Deuteronomy reveals that the concept of life is found throughout the book (6x in Moses' first speech [Dt 1:1–4:43]; 20× in his second speech [Dt 4:44–28:68]; 9× in his third speech [Dt 28:69–31:29]; 4× in the epilogue [Dt 31:30–34:12]), with the majority of references contained in Moses' second speech. The distribution is quite even, taking into account how much of the book of Deuteronomy is contained in Moses' second speech.

■ Focal points of life in Deuteronomy

Focal points of life in Deuteronomy are chapters 4, 5 and 30, each containing five or more occurrences of the concept of life. This amounts to 'nearly half' of the occurrences of the root in Deuteronomy (Markl 2014:72). These clusters are striking, as Deuteronomy 4, 5 and 30 are viewed by scholars as climactic chapters within the book.

Deuteronomy 4 can be seen as a hinge between Deuteronomy 1–3 and Deuteronomy 5–11 (cf. Rofé 1985:441–442; Tigay 1996:40). Following three chapters of historical reflection (Dt 1:1–3:29), Deuteronomy 4:1–40 is the first hortatory section in the book and is considered by many to be the climax of Moses' first speech (cf. Block 2012:114; Lundbom 2013:248). The historical reflection has the goal of reminding the current generation Moses addresses of the failures of the previous generation in order to exhort them to obey YHWH, and to refrain from idolatry. This exhortation is supported and strengthened by the five occurrences of the root חיה in the passage (Dt 4:1, 4, 9, 10, 33; cf. 4:42).

Deuteronomy 5 forms the prologue to the basic stipulations contained in Deuteronomy 6:1–11:32 (cf. Brueggemann 2001:63; McConville 2002:119–120). The heart of the chapter consists of the reiteration of the Decalogue (Dt 5:6–21; cf. Otto 2021:672). While the Decalogue does not contain any reference to the concept of life, five occurrences of the root חיה are found in the introduction to and the words following the Decalogue. References to the concept of life are employed to express responsibility (Dt 5:3), amazement (Dt 5:24, 26b), YHWH's uniqueness (Dt 5:26a) and the need for obedience (Dt 5:33).

Deuteronomy 30 is viewed as the climax of Moses' third speech (cf. Block 2012:694, 711). Scholars have long since noted the various parallels between Deuteronomy 4 and Deuteronomy 29–30 (cf. Tigay 1996:41; Weinfeld 1991:215), which supports the primacy of these chapters within Deuteronomy. Apart from the significant reference to life in Deuteronomy 30:6, there are six references to the concept of life in Deuteronomy 30:15–20, where the concept is brought to a climax (cf. Block 2012:711; Brueggemann 2001:268; Markl 2014:81–83; Wright 1996:291). Moses brings Israel before the choice of life or death, with obedience resulting in blessing and life, and disobedience in curse and death.

■ Physical life

One of the primary employments of the concept of life in Deuteronomy are occurrences where life refers to physical life. Fourteen such employments of the concept are found in the book (Dt 4:4, 33, 42; 5:3, 24, 26b; 8:3a; 19:4, 5; 20:16; 28:66ab; 31:27; 33:6).

Both Deuteronomy 4:4 and 5:3 refer to the generation Moses addresses as those who are 'alive today'. Deuteronomy 4:4 states that those who stayed true to YHWH in the midst of idolatry are those who are 'alive today', that is, survived YHWH's anger and judgement. In Deuteronomy 5:3, which is part of the prelude to the Decalogue, Moses uses corporate language (cf. Lundbom 2013:268; Merrill 1994:142; Weinfeld 1991:238) to remind his addressees that YHWH has made a covenant with 'us', namely 'all of us here alive today'.

Moses refers thrice to his addressees as those who heard YHWH's voice and yet remained 'alive' (Dt 4:33; 5:24, 26b). The context of both passages are YHWH's revelation at Horeb, and has the aim to kindle Israel's amazement at surviving the theophany and to underscore their unique experience (cf. Block 2012:143–144). Moses achieves this with rhetorical questions in Deuteronomy 4:33 and 5:26b, and historical reflection in Deuteronomy 5:24.

Deuteronomy 4:42 and 19:4–5 stipulates that someone who accidentally kills his fellow-Israelite should flee to a city of refuge to save his 'life' (cf. Nm 35:9–34). In all three of these instances, חָיָה means 'to remain alive' or 'to survive' (Ringgren 1980:333).

Deuteronomy 8:3 contains the well-known description that 'one does not live by bread alone, but [lives] by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord'.[63] This verse contains two references to the concept of life, of which the first refers to physical life. Moses reminds Israel that their existence does not depend on food alone (see the discussion of Dt 8:3b later in this chapter).

Deuteronomy 20's rules of warfare instruct Israel that during the conquest of the Promised Land they were to vanquish their enemies completely [חָרַם], ensuring that nothing remains 'alive' (Dt 20:16). This was to prevent Israel from idolatry (Dt 20:18). The verb חָיָה in Deuteronomy 20:16 is found in the *pi'el*, which denotes the act of 'keeping alive' or 'preserving alive'. Literally, Israel is commanded not to 'let live anything that breathes'. Markl (2014:73) points out that it is the only negative expression concerning life in Deuteronomy. Moreover, this is one of only two instances in Deuteronomy where life does not refer to either YHWH or Israel; it refers to the 'life' of Israel's enemies.

Deuteronomy 28's overview on covenant blessings for obedience and covenant curses for disobedience concludes with the warning that if Israel do not obey YHWH wholeheartedly, they will go into exile, where their 'life' will hang in suspense and they will have no assurance of their 'life' (Dt 28:66ab).

In the concluding words of Moses' third speech, Moses reflects on the end of his life and Israel's future, fearing that Israel will act corruptly after his death. In Deuteronomy 31:27, he bemoans the fact that Israel is rebellious even while he is still 'alive', wondering how much more rebellious they will be after his death.

In Moses' final blessing, he prays that the tribe of Ruben may 'live' (Dt 33:6). In light of the contrast between life and death [מוּת] in the prayer, it seems best to interpret this as a prayer for the survival of Ruben as a tribe.

■ Lifespan

In seven instances in Deuteronomy the root חיה is used to refer to lifespan, namely the length of time someone lives (Dt 4:9, 10; 6:2; 12:1; 16:3; 17:19; 31:13).

Five references in Deuteronomy call on Israel to fear or obey YHWH 'all the days of your life' (Dt 4:9; 6:2) or 'all the days that you live on the earth/land' (Dt 4:10; 12:1; 31:13), referring to Israel's lifespan (cf. Gerleman 1997:415; Ringgren 1980:332). These references also contain mention of Israel's children, specifically that they should teach YHWH's commandments to them (Dt 4:9, 10; 31:13) and fear YHWH together with their offspring (Dt 6:2). These references

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63. All quotations from Deuteronomy are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Where emphases are added by means of italics, they are mine.

make it clear that lifelong obedience to YHWH is not limited to the current generation. Three of these references link lifelong obedience with the possession of the Promised Land (Dt 6:2; 12:1; 31:13), which links on to the discussion of 'source of life'.

The two remaining references to lifespan refer respectively to the lifespan of Israel and their king. Deuteronomy 16's legislation on the Passover instructs Israel to remember the day of their exodus from Egypt 'all the days of your life' (Dt 16:3). Deuteronomy 17's laws concerning the king instruct the king to write for himself a copy of the law, and to read it 'all the days of his life' (Dt 17:19). The purpose is to instil fear for YHWH, thus securing a prolonged reign (Dt 17:18–20). The passage once more makes a link between life(-span) and obedience.

■ The living God

The root חיה is used twice in Deuteronomy to refer to YHWH as the living God.[64]

The first reference is found in the epilogue to the Decalogue (Dt 5:22–27). In these words, Moses reminds Israel that they were utterly terrified when they heard the words of YHWH from Horeb, and pleaded with him to intercede for them in the future. They were amazed by the fact that they, mortal men, heard the voice of 'the living God' speaking out of the midst of fire (Dt 5:26a), and still remained alive (Dt 5:26b; see the earlier discussion).

There is some difference in opinion as to the interpretation of the phrase 'the living God' in Deuteronomy 5:26. Some view it as a description for the being of God, namely that he is alive; he is a living being. More specifically, he is an ever-living being (Dt 32:40), which is in direct contrast with the mortal men his theophany at Horeb was aimed at (Weinfeld 1991:324). Others view the phrase as describing God as being actively at work (cf. Ringgren 1980:339), as is evidenced by the exodus events. Still others interpret the phrase as making a contrast between the God of Israel and the idols of the nations. He alone can act and accomplish things; they can do nothing. He alone is the 'living' God. According to Gerleman (1997:416), the phrase 'the living God' is most often used in polemical contexts, where this contrast between God and the gods is clear (cf. Weinfeld 1991:324). The immediate context of Deuteronomy 5 supports this interpretation, since the end of Moses' first speech emphasises that there is no god besides YHWH (Dt 4:35, 39), and the Decalogue, found prior to this reference of 'the living God', explicitly prohibits worshipping other gods and making idols (Dt 5:7–10).

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64. The LXX and Samaritan Pentateuch has an additional reference to the 'living God' in Deuteronomy 4:33, which can probably be ascribed to assimilation between Deuteronomy 4:33 and Deuteronomy 5:26.

The context of Deuteronomy 5 favours the third interpretation. Israel has experienced something that no other nation has experienced before: they heard God's voice! They heard him speak, and yet remained alive.

The second reference to the living God is found in Deuteronomy 32:40, which is part of the Song of Moses (Dt 32:1–43). The concluding words of the Song emphasise that there is no god like YHWH, and that YHWH swears to take vengeance on his adversaries and to repay those who hate him (Dt 32:39–42). YHWH's swearing is introduced in Deuteronomy 32:40 with the act of lifting up his hand to heaven (symbolising an oath; cf. Greenberg 1957:34–39; Lehmann 1969:74–92), followed by the oath formula 'As I live forever'. While Israel throughout the Old Testament swears by YHWH, YHWH always swears by himself, implying that he acts effectually and irrevocably (Ringgren 1980:340), and that he fulfils his intentions (Merrill 1994:424). Strikingly, the oath formula in Deuteronomy 32:40 refers to YHWH as 'living forever' (cf. Lundbom 2013:901), indicating that there is no end or diminishing of his life.

◼ Wild animals

Deuteronomy contains one occurrence of the noun חַיָּה to refer to 'living things' or 'animals' (cf. Gerleman 1997:412, 415; Ringgren 1980:342). Deuteronomy 7:22 warns Israel not to clear away the nations in the Promised Land at once during the conquest, lest the 'wild animals' become too numerous for them, indicating that a too rapid conquest will result in a resurgence of wild animals (Christensen 2001a:165). This is the only instance in Deuteronomy where the root חיה is not used to refer either to YHWH or human beings.

◼ Source of life

Apart from physical life, the other major employment of the concept of life in Deuteronomy is occurrences where life refers directly or indirectly to YHWH as the source of life. These are some of the theologically richest passages in Deuteronomy. These references indicate that YHWH has power over life (Dt 32:39), that his revealed will is the source of life (Dt 8:3b; 30:20; 32:47), and, arguably the most unique employment of the concept of life in Deuteronomy, that obedience of YHWH, mostly by means of keeping his laws, results in life (11x: Dt 4:1; 5:33; 6:24; 8:1; 16:20; 30:6, 15, 16, 19).

◼ YHWH and his revealed will as source of life

In the midst of the basic stipulations (Dt 6–11), Deuteronomy 8 exhorts Israel to continued obedience in the Promised Land by commanding them to remember their experiences in the wilderness. Part of this reflection is to

realise that YHWH fed them with manna to make them understand that 'one does not live by bread alone, but [lives] by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD' (Dt 8:3).

The parallel of these two lines is striking in Hebrew (cf. Van Leeuwen 1985:55–57). The verse does not contrast physical and spiritual food per se, but 'bread *alone*' and '*everything* that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord' (Willis 1973:144; emphasis his). Manna is but one thing that comes from the mouth of God. From the immediate context, 'everything'[65] that comes from YHWH's mouth refers to his commandments (cf. Dt 8:1), although the reference probably includes his revealed will in general (Block 2012:229). With his revealed will YHWH gives to Israel everything they need to live, namely, to obey him and consequently receive his blessing. Everything that proceeds from YHWH's mouth is 'life-sustaining' (Lundbom 2013:349–350).

Although all of Israel were physically fed with manna, the vast majority died in the wilderness because of their unwillingness to listen obediently to YHWH's words. In a sense, the manna in the wilderness teach that Israel was able to live physically (at least for a while) without truly living in the Deuteronomic sense of the word, namely living in covenant relationship with YHWH by obeying his commandments and statutes, resulting in his blessing (life) (cf. Wright 1996:123–124).

The concluding words of Deuteronomy 30 confront Israel with a choice between life and death (Dt 30:15–20). The concluding verse of the passage (Dt 30:20) states that 'he/it is your life' (הוּא חַיֶּיךָ), which can either be understood as YHWH is your life (English Standard Version [ESV]; Merrill 1994:394; Wright 1996:292) or obedience to YHWH's laws is your life (New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]; Craigie 1976:366; cf. LXX). The first interpretation implies that YHWH is the source and sustainer of Israel's life, and is supported by the immediate context. The second interpretation links on to the employment of life as the result of obedience which is found throughout Deuteronomy (see the discussion further). Exegetically, both interpretations are valid, and throughout the history of interpretation, scholars have chosen one or the other. Markl (2014:83–86), who gives a thorough overview of both options, suggests that 'the author(s) deliberately chose a form with ambiguous reference' (Markl 2014:86). If this is the case, which it seems to be, the current reference can be understood as referring to YHWH *and* obedience to YHWH as source of life.

In Deuteronomy 32:39, which various scholars consider to be the climax of the Song of Moses (cf. Block 2012:765; Wright 1996:303), YHWH calls Israel to take to heart the fact that there is no god besides him, that he kills and 'makes alive', wounds and heals, and that no one can deliver from his hand. This is the

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65. The MT literally refers to 'everything' that comes from YHWH's mouth. The LXX refers to 'every word'.

only form of the verb 'live' in Deuteronomy in the first-person (Markl 2014:73). As with other *pi'el* forms of the verb in Deuteronomy (6:24; 20:16), the verb is interpreted as referring to the act of 'keeping alive', and in this case, 'making alive' (Ringgren 1980:331, 337–338).

This reference emphasises the uniqueness, power, authority, and efficacy of YHWH. He is sui generis (cf. Block 2012:766; Claassens 2005:43); he is the Lord of life and death (cf. 1 Sm 2:6; 2 Ki 5:7); he has power over life (cf. Brensinger 1997:109). Per implication, Israel should obey him (Claassens 2005:42).

In the words following the Song of Moses, Moses warns the people that keeping the words of the Song (and most probably the words of Deuteronomy as a whole) is 'no trifling matter for you, but rather your very life' (Dt 32:47). The words of the law are words spoken by God himself, with the purpose of 'imparting life' (Craigie 1976:390) or leading to life (Merrill 1994:428). The remainder of Deuteronomy 32:47 links obedience to longevity in the Promised Land. By obeying YHWH's revealed will, Israel will enjoy his blessing.

■ Obedience as source of life

As indicated earlier, Deuteronomy contains 11 occurrences of the root חיה where life is described as the consequence or result of obedience to YHWH. Strikingly, all of them link life to the occupation and/or long-term possession of the Promised Land, and all refer to wellbeing or quality of life.

The opening words of the climax of Moses' first speech start with the exhortation that Israel should 'give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, *so that you may live* […]' (Dt 4:1). The result clause 'so that you may live' indicates that the outcome of Israel's obedience is life (cf. Gerleman 1997:416–417; Ringgren 1980:334–335).

At first glance, life can be understood to refer to physical life. If Israel obeys YHWH's laws, they will remain alive. If they do not, they will die. This is supported by Deuteronomy 4:4, where Moses reminds the people that those who did not commit idolatry (follow the Baal of Peor; cf. Nm 25:1–9; 31:16), but stayed true to YHWH, are 'alive' today. The idolatry of the previous generation resulted in YHWH's anger, and their physical death.

Others translate Deuteronomy 4:1 as 'listen […] to do them, so that you may live *to* go in and take possession of the land' (cf. Tigay 1996:42; Weinfeld 1991:195; NRSV). Such an interpretation implies that obedience to the divine statutes and ordinances will allow Israel to enter and occupy the Promised Land; disobedience will result in physical death prior to the conquest. This view is supported by the warning of Deuteronomy 4:26, which warns that

Israel will perish from the land if they commit idolatry, as well as the various references in Deuteronomy that makes obedience a prerequisite for possession and occupation of the land (e.g. Dt 5:33; 8:1; etc.).

The broader context of Deuteronomy 4, however, supports the view that more than physical life is meant in Deuteronomy 4:1. Deuteronomy 4:9–10 implies that Israel may somewhere during their lifespan forget what YHWH did for them and taught them, and yet remain alive. Deuteronomy 4:26's warning that disobedience will make the people perish from the land 'soon' and that they will 'not live long on it' implies that disobedience does not necessarily result in immediate death. Deuteronomy 4:28's warning against exile implies that disobedience would not result in everyone's death, for some would go into exile. The rest of Israel's history recorded in the Old Testament supports this interpretation.

Consequently, Deuteronomy 4:1's reference to life as a result of obedience to YHWH's commandments refers to more than physical life. 'Life' here has the nuance of wellbeing or quality of life. If Israel obeys YHWH, not only will they live physically, but they will enjoy his blessing, namely the fullness of life that comes from living in relation and obedience to him (cf. Block 2012:115).

Deuteronomy 5, which contains the Decalogue and forms the prologue to Deuteronomy 6:1–11:32's elaboration of the basic stipulations, concludes with the exhortation: 'You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you, *so that you may live* [...]' (Dt 5:33). Together with Deuteronomy 5:32, these words underscore the need for wholehearted obedience to YHWH's commands (cf. Merrill 1994:160). As with Deuteronomy 4:1, Deuteronomy 5:33's call to obedience contains a reference to the Promised Land and is introduced with the same result clause. Deuteronomy 5:33 also links life to prosperity and a long life in the Promised Land, which gives 'life' here the nuance of wellbeing or quality of life (cf. Ringgren 1980:334).

Deuteronomy 6:20–25 pictures a hypothetical situation where a son asks his father about the meaning of YHWH's decrees, statutes, and ordinances. The prescribed answer the father is to give, underscores YHWH's deliverance of Israel from Egypt with signs and wonders. Among others, the father is to say: 'Then the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our lasting good, *so as to keep us alive*, as is now the case' (Dt 6:24). Once more life is linked to obedience, and the Promised Land is in the foreground (cf. Dt 6:23). As with Deuteronomy 5:33, life is linked to wellbeing. Israel is to fear YHWH, which will result in life. However, unlike Deuteronomy 4:1 and 5:33, Deuteronomy 6:24 uses a different result clause (לְ instead of לְמַעַן), and the verb 'live' is in the *pi'el* form, which usually denotes the act of 'keeping alive' (Ringgren 1980:331) or 'letting live' (Gerleman 1997:414; cf. Block 2005:17). Furthermore, life in Deuteronomy 6:24 is unique

for its link with 'righteousness' in Deuteronomy 6:25. In this context, righteousness refers to that which is ethically right (Brown, Driver & Briggs 1977:842), namely 'faithful compliance with the covenant' (Merrill 1994:175), and as such, strengthens the overall call to obedience. Obedience is viewed as the 'right response' (Wright 1996:104) to the saving acts of YHWH (cf. Block 2005:13).

Deuteronomy 8, which instructs Israel to keep YHWH's commandments in the Promised Land, starts with the exhortation: 'This entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe, *so that you may live* and increase, and go in and occupy the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors' (Dt 8:1). Once more life is linked to obedience and the possession of the Promised Land and is introduced with the preposition indicating result. Here, for the first time, life is connected to Israel's growth. Obedience will result in the multiplication of the people. This suggests that Israel throughout the generations is called to obedience (McConville 2002:168), and that the possession of the land refers to its long-term retention (Brueggemann 2001:104).

Deuteronomy 16:18–20's laws regarding the appointment of judges and officers instructs Israel as a whole to do the following: 'Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, *so that you may live* and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you' (Dt 16:20). These words state that justice is a prerequisite for life in the Promised Land, with the pursuit of justice viewed as part of covenant loyalty to YHWH (cf. Coetsee 2021:8; Wright 1996:205). Once more life is linked to obedience and the inheritance of the land and introduced with the same proposition indicating result.

Deuteronomy 30 envisions Israel's return from exile when they turn to YHWH and obey him (Dt 30:1–5). This is followed by the striking promise that YHWH will resolve his people's unfaithful inclination: 'Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, *in order that you may live*' (Dt 30:6). Previously, in the basic stipulations, Israel were called to circumcise their hearts (Dt 10:16). Here the circumcision of the heart is indicated as an act of God. YHWH will remove whatever prevents his people from following his laws and decrees (cf. Christensen 2001b:739; Tigay 1996:285). They will then be able to uphold the *Shema* (Dt 6:4–5), namely, to love YHWH with all their heart and soul. This will result in 'life'; it will enable them to 'live'.

As with previous references, this reference links life to obedience (with 'love' indicating total covenant commitment; cf. Block 2012:697), is introduced with the same preposition indicating result and the (return to the) Promised Land is in view. All of this indicates that 'life' in Deuteronomy 30:6 should be understood as a reference to wellbeing or quality of life. The unique

emphasis of 'life' in Deuteronomy 30:6 is that unlike previous references that emphasise obedience as prerequisite for life, life is seen here as the consequence of YHWH's gracious covenant faithfulness (cf. McConville 2002:427; Wright 1996:289). Israel is promised that YHWH will in future enable them to do what they were supposed to do. He will enable them to obey; he will enable them to live.

As indicated earlier, the concept of life is brought to a climax in Deuteronomy 30:15–20. This passage is also viewed by some as the high point of Moses' third speech, and possibly the high point of Deuteronomy as a whole (Lenchak 1993:113). This short passage contains six of Deuteronomy's 39 occurrences of the root חיה, of which five refer to life as the consequence or result of obedience (Dt 30:15, 16, 19; cf. Merrill 1994:392; Ringgren 1980:333–335). Here Israel is given the choice between life and death, and called in the clearest words to choose life (Dt 30):

> See, I have set before you today *life* and prosperity, death, and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lᴏʀᴅ your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, *then you shall live* and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess [...] I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you *life* and death, blessings and curses. Choose *life so that* you and your descendants *may live* [...]. (vv. 15–16, 19)

These words form a perfect dichotomy. On the one hand, Moses links life with prosperity, obedience, increase, blessing and entering and possessing the Promised Land. On the other hand, Moses links death [מָוֶת] – the exact opposite of life – with adversity, perishing and a short life in the Promised Land (cf. Dt 30:17–18). This forms a parallel with the blessings and curses found in Deuteronomy 11:26–32 and 28:1–68. Deuteronomy 30:19–20 follows with the direct and urgent exhortation that Israel should choose life. Although all of Israel is addressed in these words, Moses uses the second person singular, which, according to Wright (1996:292), presents 'the whole matter as an intensely personal choice'. Moreover, Craigie (1976:366) correctly indicates that these words 'are virtually a command: *you shall choose life*' (emphasis his)'. Paradoxically, according to Deuteronomy 30:19, choosing life would result in life.

Choosing life boils down to loving YHWH wholeheartedly (Brueggemann 2001:270; cf. Brensinger 1997:109), which is to show covenant fidelity (Block 2012:711). The uniqueness of these references is that life is explicitly referred to as a choice (cf. Miller 2013:143; Schrieber 1998:347; Jos 24:14–15), albeit an obvious choice. The onus is on Israel to choose if they truly want to live in the Deuteronomic sense of the word. If they do, unlike the previous generation that chose death and destruction, they have to choose to love (obey) YHWH wholeheartedly.

■ YHWH and Israel

Only two of the 39 occurrences of the root חיה in Deuteronomy do not refer to either YHWH or Israel (cf. Dt 7:22; 20:16). Taking all of the above into consideration, a panoramic view can be given of what the concept of life in Deuteronomy in toto reveals about YHWH and Israel.

YHWH is depicted in Deuteronomy as the only living God (Dt 5:26a), who has no end or diminishing of life (Dt 32:40). He has power over life and death (Dt 32:39). He is the source of his people's life (Dt 30:20), while his revealed will sustains their life (Dt 8:3b; 30:20; 32:47). He promises to one day enable his people to (truly) live by removing whatever prevents them from following his laws and decrees (Dt 30:6). Strikingly, except for two references (Dt 5:26a; 8:3b), the majority of references that refer to YHWH and life are found in the final chapters of Deuteronomy.

Turning to Israel, Deuteronomy contains a number of references to the people's physical life: the generation Moses addresses is called those who are 'alive today' (Dt 4:4; 5:3), who heard YHWH's voice at Horeb and yet remained 'alive' (Dt 4:33; 5:24, 26b); someone who accidentally kills his fellow-Israelite can flee to a city of refuge to save his life (Dt 4:42; 19:4, 5); Moses refers to himself as alive (Dt 31:27), and prays that Ruben may survive as a tribe (Dt 33:6).

However, the majority of references refer to more than physical life; they refer to Israel's wellbeing or quality of life. Israel does not live by bread alone, but by everything that comes from YHWH's mouth (Dt 8:3). They are to obey YHWH's commandments wholeheartedly to enjoy quality of life, which is the result of his blessings, especially in the form of prosperity, longevity and increase in the Promised Land (Dt 4:1; 5:33; 6:24; 8:1; 16:20). The obedience they are called to is not fleeting or whimsical, but lifelong and generation-spanning (Dt 4:9,10; 6:2; 31:13; cf. 12:1; 16:3; Millar 1998:98). The king, as head of Israel, is to learn and exemplify wholehearted obedience to YHWH by reading from his copy of the law all the days of his life (Dt 17:19). If they do not obey YHWH wholeheartedly, they will go into exile where they will have no assurance of their life (Dt 28:66ab). The only sensible route to follow – in fact, the only route there is – is to deliberately choose wholehearted obedience to YHWH (Dt 30:15, 16, 19abc), the source of life.

■ Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the employment of the concept of life in Deuteronomy. Taking this overview as a departure point, the chapter concludes by briefly reflecting on Deuteronomy's unique employment of the concept of life in the Pentateuch.

While the concept of life in Deuteronomy has parallels with the employment of the concept elsewhere in the Pentateuch, especially with regard to references to physical life, lifespan and God as the living God, Deuteronomy's employment of the concept is unique within the Pentateuch because of its emphasis on YHWH as the source of life, specifically that obedience to YHWH and his commandments results in life.

This employment of the concept of life calls the book of Genesis to mind, where God is emphasised as the creator and sustainer (see ch. 2 in this volume). Although there is some overlap between these two books in this regard, Deuteronomy's emphasis is that YHWH reveals to his people what it means to live with quality of life, which is to live in covenant relationship with him by keeping the commands and statutes he gave them. This is what it truly means to live in the Deuteronomistic sense of the word, and, as will be seen in the chapters to follow, this employment of the concept of life is found throughout the rest of the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms, Proverbs and the Minor and Major Prophets.

Life in the Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings

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■ Introduction

Reading the Former Prophets demands attention to their basic form when considering their understanding of any theological issue. In that they are primarily a narrative that covers the period of Israel's life from their entry to the land under Joshua through to the exile, means that we are engaging with a text which can (at a most basic level) be read as a story. The text does make historical claims which must be evaluated, but this does not change the fact that it is presented in the form of story. Attention to its form as a story means that we are primarily concerned to read it at the level of discourse,[66] an approach that requires attention to the means by which the narrator presents the story, and in particular the process of selection that

66. Here, drawing on the work of Genette (1980) and Schmid (2010). See also Long (1994).

has been applied in this presentation. This means we understand that narrated accounts seldom express their theology directly. Rather, the dominant approach within the Old Testament as a whole, and the Former Prophets in particular, is that narrators 'show' but do not 'tell'. That is, they generally report events as having happened but seldom comment directly on how readers are to interpret them. There are obvious exceptions to this, such as the direct comment in 2 Samuel 11:27 that 'The thing that David had done was evil in the sight of Yahweh'. Yet it is because such comments are relatively rare that they stand out. Overall, theological emphases are evident from those things which the narrative commends or condemns, but this is seldom expressed directly.

Despite this, there are ways in which the narrators of the Former Prophets address their readers in a slightly more direct manner. At points, we encounter passages where the narrators move from reporters to those who editorialise on the story that has been told. This is particularly clear in 2 Kings 17:7–41 where those responsible for the book make explicit comments on the reasons behind the exile of the northern kingdom to Assyria, while also preparing for the coming exile of Judah. A briefer example of this approach can also be seen in 2 Kings 24:3–4 which explains why Josiah's reforms had been insufficient to spare Judah from exile too. Other points where there are direct comments are less explicit in their theology – for example, the statement that 'In those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did as they saw fit' (Jdg 17:6, 21:25) is more ambiguous. Is this advocating kingship as the solution to the problems described here or not? But when we look at the topic of life, we quickly discover that there are no direct comments from the narrators to guide us.

But there is another approach that has not been explored as thoroughly, and that is where the narrator is able to address their readers through the words of characters within the story. Adherents of the theory of the Deuteronomistic History thus often point to how the Former Prophets can be divided by important speeches which provide a reflection on Israel's story to that point, though once we reach the end of each kingdom there is no character available through whom to speak. This is no longer a paradigm for reading these texts that I follow (see Firth 2009), but that a narrator might use a speech from a character within the story to represent their own views is not unlikely when it is given a high level of prominence, or what Schmid (2010:9) calls 'eventfulness'. An 'eventful' text is one which is marked in a range of ways so that readers see it as having special prominence, and thus attend to it.

Not all speeches can fulfil this function. Those points where the narrator speaks directly to the reader are clearly important, a means for breaking the 'fourth wall' between the narrator and reader. Points where particular speeches are made eventful on the Schmid's model can certainly be considered. An important feature of such speeches is that they can enable the 'you' that is

addressed to be both the audience reported in the book and also the intended readership, though we would look for other elements in the speech to show that both audiences are intended. For example, Joshua's final address (Jos 24:1–28) could be understood as being addressed only to the audience at Shechem. However, within the speech, we can note that Joshua frequently blurs the distinction between various generations, especially in 24:5–7 where he integrates his audience on that day into events that referred to prior generations which were not (at one level) true for the audience at Shechem. Hence, he declares that Yahweh had brought 'you' out from Egypt, and that when he had brought their fathers out, 'you' reached the Sea. Even though their ancestors had cried out for deliverance there, 'your eyes' had seen it. Now, it is clear that if we follow the account of the exodus and entry into the land that those at Shechem had not come out of Egypt, nor had they been at the crossing of the Sea. But by blurring the generations, Joshua places them into the larger story. Narratively, the eventfulness of this chapter means it is given significance, and the fact that this generational blurring can take place allows subsequent readers also to see themselves as present in Yahweh's acts of salvation, even though they were not themselves there. Thus, through the speech of a character in the story, the narrators of the Former Prophets can also speak directly to their audience.

A less commonly appreciated example of this phenomenon is of importance for our theme. In the books of Samuel, there are four principal poems that are important for the structure and message of the book (1 Sm 2:1–10; 2 Sm 1:17–27; 22:1–51; 23:1–7, cf. Firth 2017:41–49). As poems embedded in the narrative, they are made particularly eventful (cf. Watts 1992:19–40). But unlike the speeches that have been typically studied across the Former Prophets as a whole, of which Joshua 24 is an example, these poems do not retain any record of the audience addressed. Each of them at some point addresses an unnamed 'you'.[67] But lacking any other audience, those addressed become the readers of the book. These poems are thus a more subtle mechanism by which a narrator may address readers (Firth forthcoming), breaking the fourth wall through something voiced by a character within the narrative. This is important because it means that narrators can take the voice of the character to express their key theological concerns through these texts, providing readers with guidance on how to read these stories, providing a key to understand what is shown in the main narrative.

For our purposes, the first of Samuel's principal poems, Hannah's Prayer (1 Sm 2:1–10) is particularly important, because the theme of life is made explicit through its use of the verb חיה. Within Samuel, this prayer is particularly important in that it outlines the book's key themes before they

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67. At points, typically when the second person singular is used, the 'you' is Yahweh, but where the plural is employed this refers to the readers.

happen (Firth 2021), most obviously referring to Yahweh's king even before Israel has a king, or indeed had even asked for one (1 Sm 2:10). In terms of the theme of life, we can immediately note that 1 Samuel 2:6 declares that Yahweh kills (hi. מות) and brings to life (pi. חיה).[68] This statement is further developed by noting that Yahweh brings down to Sheol, and also raises up, though we should probably understand these lines as broadly synonymous to the prayer's opening.[69] In short, it is Yahweh who controls and provides both life and death. But within the prayer, this verse forms part of the section begun at 1 Samuel 2:3 in which the audience has been admonished not to speak with pride or arrogance because knowledge also belongs to Yahweh. This knowledge is explored through the reversal of fortunes motif that runs through the balance of the poem where Yahweh exalts the weak but brings down the powerful. The statement about life (and therefore also death) needs to be seen within the framework this establishes. Those who claim life for themselves are likely to be brought down low, possibly to the point of death. Life is rather to be lived under the context of Yahweh's sovereignty, though he will also express this through his king. Life is thus to be lived from the perspective of the rule of God, a rule which works for the weak so that they have a filled and satisfied existence. A life that does not see that this authority belongs to Yahweh seeks to hold power for itself, and this is a life that will not endure. Although all of this is voiced within the text by Hannah, through her prayer the narrator is also able to address the audience that reads the book to emphasise this point. Moreover, as we shall see, the rest of Samuel demonstrates the truth of the central assertion about life here as Hannah's Prayer introduces the main themes that are developed in the book.

Although each book of the Former Prophets is read here as a discrete work, it is one that has still been integrated into the larger whole, and a narrative reading of the whole of the Former Prophets will demonstrate that the themes developed in Hannah's Prayer can be traced across this collection. In order to keep our survey to a manageable size, we will explore this through texts that use the root חיה, but with a particular focus on instances where death [מות] also occurs because it is the correlation of these elements in the Prayer that highlights the theme of life. As the amount of material in Joshua and Judges is relatively small and consistent, we can treat these two together, but more substantial readings of Samuel and Kings are needed as they develop this theme further.

68. The piel here functions factitively (Williams §141). This verse has a close parallel in Deuteronomy 32:39 but note that in Deuteronomy the equivalent statement is within a citation of Yahweh's speech, whereas here the statement is presented as a third person statement directed to an audience. There is a clear theological relationship between these passages, but they work with different rhetorical models.

69. Admittedly, there is never exact synonymity in poetry, and the 'A, and what's more B' pattern (cf. Kugel 1981:8) is still evident here, but the differences are not such that we need to divide the parts of the verse from one another.

Overall, it will be seen that the themes in Hannah's Prayer are a window through which to read these texts, and hence understand their theology of life. We will note that within Samuel this is demonstrated through Yahweh's king. But Kings will extend this, especially in the Elijah stories, to show that this understanding of life (and death) exists outside the boundaries of Israel, providing an implicit critique of other religious systems that Israel encountered. All of this thus prepares readers for the final reflections on both kingdoms that Kings provides, so that although the terms themselves are not used, they are integrated into them.

■ Life in Joshua and Judges

Within Joshua, language associated with life occurs almost exclusively in the context of those who are identified as non-Israelite.[70] That is, discussion of life is clustered around the accounts of Rahab and the Gibeonites, though there is also the striking example of Caleb. As we shall note, Caleb's non-Israelite heritage is also stressed in Joshua, so that all the texts reflecting on life do so with those whose relationship to Israel is not one of immediate descent. There is an intriguing exception to this in Joshua 5:8, though even here there is a stress on those involved having stood in a non-orthodox relationship to Yahweh. But what unites each example in Joshua is a focus on submission to Yahweh's reign, even though those submitting might otherwise have expected to die. Instead, they are granted life.

The story of Rahab provides an important window into the theme within Joshua. The threat of death is present throughout her story, most obviously because of the particularly strict understanding of the ban [חרם] that was applied at Jericho, though in her plea for the life of her family she specifically asks that they be delivered from death (מות – Jos 2:13). As in Hannah's prayer, life emerges in relation to death. Rahab is presented as someone who understands what Yahweh is doing in bringing Israel through the wilderness so that they were now on the verge of entering the land. She clearly grasps that it is Yahweh who has determined that she and her father's house stand under the ban, and that their lives therefore are at risk. Therefore, she asks the scouts to swear an oath by Yahweh that they will be kept alive on account of the חסד that she has shown them. Although the scouts are generally regarded as being less than effective as spies (see, e.g. Butler 2014:252), there is a solemnity to their oath in which they offer their own lives in place of hers should they fail to honour their side of the bargain. Scholars have long debated the validity of this oath (compare Hawk 2000:35; Winther-Nielsen 1995:162), but readers are probably not in a position to resolve this matter at the end of Joshua 2. Rather, only after Rahab and her family survive Jericho's fall (Jos 6:17) before being permitted to remain alive within Israel (Jos 6:29) can we

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70. On the importance of this theme in Joshua, see Firth (2019:13–52).

determine that her survival is accepted. But remaining alive in this setting is more than simply the opposite of dying. Not dying is merely the minimum requirement for life. Rather, that Rahab and her family continue within Israel indicates that they have, to some extent, become part of the life of Israel. If so, then they now experience חסד from Yahweh because she had shown חסד to the scouts. Indeed, we can suggest that it is this gracious experience of a relationship given by Yahweh that is at the heart of the life she and her family now have.

We can observe some patterns in the account of the Gibeonites. Like Rahab, they are Canaanites (in this case, Hivites – Jos 9:7, 11:19), but unlike her there is no claim of חסד in their story. Indeed, theirs is a story of deception which led to Joshua and the elders of Israel making a covenant with them because they believed they were a people from outside the land. Nevertheless, like Rahab they show that they are aware of Yahweh's purposes even if they do not show any interest in committing themselves to these purposes. In this case, the word מות does not appear, though there is certainly the threat of death implied when the Israelites marched to their cities, even if there was no attack because of the oath that had been sworn to them. Prior to this, they had managed to negotiate their survival through deception when they convinced Israel to apply the laws that related to nations outside the land to them (Jos 9:3–15; cf. Dt 20:10–18). From the perspective of the narrator, the covenant established because of this was what enabled them to live. In this case, the piel of חיה used has a factitive sense (cf. Williams & Beckman 2007:141) – life was granted because a covenant of peace was established (Jos 9:15), and this life would therefore endure.

But what was this life? Again, the larger context makes it clear that this is considerably more than just survival, though their final speech with Israel also indicates that this was a factor (Jos 9:24). In terms of the covenant itself, survival was not an element requested. That Israel might have been a threat to them is still made clear in their references to Sihon and Og, looking back to the events before Israel had reached the plains of Moab (cf. Nm 21:21–35). But they had not asked for survival even though it was included in the results of the covenant. The peace established with them is more than just survival, even if that is the starting point. The covenant requested had placed them in the position of vassals to Israel, as is evident from their use of 'servant' language, but a servant would look to their suzerain to provide for them in various ways too. All of this was put at risk once Israel realised that they had been tricked. Nevertheless, although Israel would have liked to place them under the ban, they stopped short of even attacking their towns because of the oath that had been sworn, deciding that they should live. The life they would then live was considerably less than what might have initially been expected as they are ultimately placed in a menial role in the sanctuary, but it was still a role that meant they lived in a constructive way (cf. Ford 2015:21–

214). Moreover, in that Israel felt it could not kill the Gibeonites because of their oath to Yahweh, it is again clear that the operative approach here sees Yahweh, not Israel, as the one who controls life and death.

We can consider Caleb as a final example from Joshua. In Numbers 13–14, Caleb was one of two spies (Joshua himself being the other) who had encouraged Israel to enter the land. It is to these events that Caleb refers when asking for a personal allotment based on a promise from Yahweh, noting that Yahweh had kept him alive (here, hiphil of חיה) for 45 years up to that point (Jos 14:10). Although מות does not occur here, the use of the hiphil makes it clear that death was the alternative possibility. Here it is again made clear that it is Yahweh who grants life. What is perhaps surprising about the presentation of Caleb in Joshua is that he is called 'the Kenizzite' twice (Jos 14:6, 14). This term is used for him elsewhere only once (Nm 32:12), a term that almost certainly identifies him with Edomite clans (cf. Gn 36:11), even they had been integrated into Israel at an earlier stage (cf. Wray Beal 2017). However, this background was not forgotten and continued to be used to identify Caleb. But because 'ben Jephunneh' was normally enough, why should this additional label be so prominent in Joshua? Perhaps one reason was because it presents Rahab as the paradigm figure for the first half of the book, while Caleb fulfils that role in the second half. If so, then the paradigm figure in both cases is a foreigner who has committed himself or herself to Yahweh, something that challenges those who might be considered ethnically Israelite – a matter that comes to particular prominence in the account of Achan when he is put to death for taking from the banned items at Jericho (Jos 7). Life is something that Yahweh can grant or take away, but in all instances, life is more than mere survival. The life that matters is one in which Yahweh provides more than survival. Rather, life is something in which Yahweh's provision is noted most clearly among those who might initially seem to have been excluded from it because of their heritage. This in turn explains the otherwise curious note in Joshua 5:8 where the verb חיה is applied to the men who were circumcised at Gilgal after entering the land. It is usually translated as 'healed', noting that the men would otherwise have suffered because of this surgery. But once they were recovered, they once again 'lived' because life is about a fullness that is given by Yahweh, a fullness that Israel then experienced in Yahweh's declaration that the reproach of Egypt had been rolled away from Israel before they also celebrated Passover and (for the first time) ate the produce of the land (Jos 5:8–12).

Life is not a major theme in Joshua, but it is more marginal still for Judges. There is, of course, plenty of death, but life emerges as a theme only as a minor element of the Gideon and Samson stories and as part of a tragically ironic element in the book's conclusion.

In the Gideon narrative, the incident of interest for us occurs in his encounter with Zebah and Zalmunna (Jdg 8:18–19). Here, Gideon challenges them about

the people they had killed at Tabor, declaring that they were his kin. Having indicated that he would have permitted them to live had they left his kin alive, Gideon then swore to put them to death. His oath invokes 'Yahweh who lives' and therefore indicates awareness on Gideon's part that life comes from Yahweh, though in this instance it is Gideon's own decision to execute them. In that this is his last act before the account of his 'Ephod' (Jdg 8:22–28), a passage that points to clear failures on his part, it is likely that we are not expected to read this account as a wholly positive presentation of him either. If so, we cannot assume that the narrator approves of his position.

In the Samson story, the motif appears in passing at two points. First, in Judges 15:19, Samson was able to drink from the water that God provided in a spring at Lehi. This occurred after his slaughter of 1000 men with a donkey's jawbone, at which point the narrator laconically observes that 'he was very thirsty' (Jdg 15:18). Once Samson had drunk the water, we are told that his 'spirit returned' and he revived [חיה]. As Samson's own death is not here in view, this observation sits alongside that of Joshua 5:8, where the verb is used to mean something like 'recover one's health'.[71] By contrast, the other passing reference (Jdg 16:30) occurs in the note about Samson's death, where it is observed that he killed more in his death than in his life. There may be a hint here that Samson's was not a life where he achieved all that could be done, but as this observation falls outside the narrative, it is difficult to draw more from this comment.

The final note is again provided only in passing. In Judges 21:14, following the Benjaminite war, it is noted that the survivors from Benjamin were given women that the rest of Israel had kept alive from Jabesh-gilead when they had attacked it. The life of these women was hardly desirable. They were kept alive only because they were virgins so that they could be married off when captured. As such, there is a deep irony in the note here. They did indeed survive, but this was hardly a life that would be desired. Instead, this becomes part of the evidence of what life in Israel had become 'when there was no king in Israel, and everyone did as they saw fit' (Jdg 17:6, 21:24). We should perhaps consider the possibility that Judges offers little to a theology of life because so much of what Israel would regard as fitting for such a theology could not be described in this period.

■ Life in Samuel

Where life is only a marginal theme in Joshua and Judges, the same cannot be said for Samuel. Here, though not to the same extent as Kings, life becomes an important motif. However, we should note that whereas the

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71. It should be noted that this element is much more prominent in Kings than in the other books of the Former Prophets.

verb חיה is often used in Kings with the sense of 'recover one's health', this is not a sense found within Samuel. Rather, Hannah's prayer is the lens through which the motif is principally developed. However, in doing so it both reflects on the discussion of life in Joshua – Judges and prepares for its treatment in Kings. That is, through Hannah we can look back on the presentation of Joshua and Judges and appreciate the hints these texts provide about life as more than survival, as something to be understood as a gift from Yahweh, which can therefore point to the good life as something fulfilled and fulfilling. As we have commented on Hannah's prayer before, we note here only other passages that reflect this motif within Samuel, though the increased number of texts means that we will need to be selective. To keep this material in a manageable form, we shall begin by considering nominal forms before examining verbs.

■ Usage of the noun חַי in Samuel

One important development within Samuel in comparison to Joshua and Judges is the fact that the noun חי becomes quite common, occurring some 46 times, as opposed to only six in the whole of Joshua and Judges. Although many of these occur in oath formulations that assert 'as Yahweh lives' (e.g. 1 Sm 14:39, 45), the existence of such a form is itself evidence of a developing awareness of the importance of Yahweh as a living God, and therefore the one who grants life. Such oaths should also be seen in light of Hannah's oath when speaking to Eli to affirm that she was indeed the one who had prayed before him for a child (1 Sm 1:26, cf. Abner to Saul, 1 Sm 17:55), which shows that the oath invoking Yahweh as the living God was itself patterned on an oath form that was apparently relatively common. When speaking to Eli, it was self-evident that he was alive, so Hannah's point is that it should be equally clear that her claim was true. That Yahweh lived could equally be taken as axiomatic, providing a meaningful basis for oath formulations.

Nevertheless, we should note that the noun can be used simply to refer to existence. Two instances of this can be noted as examples. First, in David's lament over Saul and Jonathan, he looks back and observes that they were not divided in life and death. Taken on its own, life here is simply the opposite of death, even if the life they had lived had been exceptional in some ways. But read in light of Hannah's prayer, with its declaration about Yahweh as the one who both kills and gives life (1 Sm 2:6), this observation should probably be nuanced. As something that was clearly intended as a public text (cf. 2 Sm 1:18), it would not be appropriate for David to have expressed Yahweh's role too directly, especially as he is shortly afterwards shown to be seeking support from those loyal to Saul (2 Sm 2:4b–7). However, when read through the framework provided by Hannah's prayer, it is possible to see that for Samuel's

compilers we should see their deaths as confirming Hannah's insight, something that becomes especially clear in light of the message of judgement provided by Samuel's shade (1 Sm 28:15–19). What David cannot say directly, the narrators can imply, so that Saul in death takes Jonathan with him, but he is brought to death because Yahweh has done it even though it happened through the Philistines. Read in its larger context, even something that looks like a simple observation takes on greater meaning. Although we cannot assume this is always the case, a second example makes it clear that even when someone's existence is intended, the possibility of Yahweh granting life continues. This is most obvious in the account of David mourning over the death of his and Bathsheba's infant son. Here, his servants are confused as he mourns while the child was alive, but then returns to normal life after the child's death. His servants were therefore afraid to report the child's death. But seeing them whispering, David explained that he had fasted and wept while the child lived because he hoped Yahweh would be gracious[72] to him so that the child might live (2 Sm 12:22). In that the child had not died at that point, life is here clearly more than mere existence. More particularly, that Yahweh might give life to the child (while allowing for the possibility of death as an outcome consistent with the announced punishment of 2 Sm 12:14) clearly echoes Hannah's prayer. On the other hand, with the child's death, David accepted the fact that the child would not be brought to life again. Yahweh is the one who gives life and removes it, but the life he gives can be more than simple existence.

The fundamental reason for this, as evidenced by the oath formulas invoking Yahweh, is that Yahweh is the living God. This element is particularly important in David's encounter when he insisted that Goliath was defying the armies of the 'living God' (1 Sm 17:26; cf. 1 Sm 17:36).[73] This statement is presented as the first point at which David begins to reframe the view that had previously been presented by Goliath (1 Sm 17:1–11), and finds its climax in David's declaration that through him defeating Goliath, the whole world would know there was a God in Israel (1 Sm 17:46). Although the specific language of life is not present here, it is to be evidenced through Goliath's death, and thus demonstrates that David's initial observation is valid. Again, it is Yahweh who kills and Yahweh who gives life. This statement then finds confirmation in David's Victory Song (2 Sm 22), where David can affirm that Yahweh lives, and that Yahweh has avenged him on his enemies, thus also enabling David himself to live (2 Sm 22:47). That Yahweh lives is foundational to life in Israel, and this point helps the books of Samuel to look into the possibilities of a richer life that Yahweh can grant.

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72. The verb here, חנן, recalls Hannah's name, though an intentional word play may claim too much.

73. In MT – the main LXX tradition omits these verses. For a defence of MT as the base text, see Firth (2009:194–195).

■ Usage of the verb חָיָה in Samuel

Although Samuel uses the noun in a various ways, its use of verbs is much more limited. Indeed, there are only eight instances in the whole book, a level of usage broadly similar to that of Joshua. As we have already noted the importance of the piel participle in Hannah's prayer (1 Sm 2:6),[74] we need only note that although the use of the verb is limited (unlike Kings), these uses are consistent with the elements already noted. Two basic usages can be noted, where the verb is used in the hope for a long life, or where it is used to contrast with those who are killed.

The first usage occurs in 1 Samuel 10:24 and 2 Samuel 16:16, the latter repeating the formulation.[75] In all three instances, the same phrase occurs, a qal jussive with the king as the object. This is usually translated along the lines of 'Long live the king!' (ESV). Such language is formulaic, though in the case of Hushai's repeated use of the phrase before Absalom his rhetoric depends on it being understood as no more than a formula because he never clarifies that the king to whom he refers is actually David and not, as might have been assumed, Absalom (Firth 2009:466; Long 2020:407). Although Yahweh is not mentioned, the implication of the jussive here is that Yahweh should grant long life. Clearly, the hope is more than just that life be extended, and indeed there is no direct equivalent to 'long' in the phrase and we could equally translate it as 'May the king live well' because, as observable elsewhere, the verb is associated with a quality of life. A related sense is also seen in Nathan's parable, where it is said that the poor man 'nourished' the lamb (2 Sm 12:3), which in this case involves providing that which is necessary for life to flourish.

The second usage is more straightforward and refers to instances where someone was able to live rather than die. We see this when the Amalekite reports his (supposed) actions to David. His claim is that he killed Saul because he was sure that he could not live (2 Sm 1:10). For our purposes it does not matter if he tells the truth, because in either case he was effectively claiming that it was a mercy killing. The same cannot be said for David's actions in 1 Samuel 27:9, 11, both of which point to the fact that he did not permit the people where he raided to survive lest word come back to Achish. At this point therefore we see a more foundational element of life as existence, though there is perhaps a hint in the Amalekite's defence that life should offer something more than Saul was then experiencing.

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74. Though, specific to usage in Samuel, Fokkelman (2020:18) has pointed out that this phrase is the exact centre of the poem. However, his argument about the importance of this language as a whole depends on Samuel not finishing until 1 Kings 2.

75. Omitted in some versions but needing to be retained as a feature of Hushai's characterisation.

◼ Life in Kings

The first three books of the Former Prophets use the verb חיה sparingly, but with the noun חי becoming relatively prominent in Samuel. But both the noun and the verb are used quite extensively in the book of Kings, making it the richest source in this collection for reflection on this topic. Indeed, the noun occurs some 41 times, while the verb occurs a further 30 times. Put simply, the language of life occurs more frequently in Kings than in the rest of Joshua – Samuel combined. Nevertheless, the patterns already seen continue here. Again, we shall treat occurrences of the noun first and then the verb.

◼ Usage of the noun חַי in Kings

As noted, the noun חי is relatively common in Kings. Some occurrences repeat the pattern noted in Samuel, and it is worth noting that the oath formula 'as Yahweh lives' is the first instance of the motif in Kings (1 Ki 1:29). However, as David speaks here, he points to Yahweh having redeemed his life from his adversaries (אשר–פדה את–נפשי מכל–צרה). Despite a change of verb, there seems to be an allusion here back to the narrator's introduction to David's Victory Song (2 Sm 22:1), so that David's oath is based not only on the reality of Yahweh's life, but also because he has provided life for David in the face of adversity.[76] As such, this opening oath formula is placed firmly in the developing pattern noted in Samuel, and provides further evidence of the themes outlined in Hannah's prayer.

Similar oath formulae occur later in the book. Solomon's oath concerning Adonijah (1 Ki 2:24) follows the same pattern except that rather than focusing on deliverance from enemies, he looks instead to how Yahweh has secured his throne. Nevertheless, the formula functions in much the same way because Solomon's own life is determined by Yahweh's. A more intriguing example of the oath formula occurs in Elijah's encounter with the widow of Zarephath (1 Ki 17:12). She is presented as an outsider to Israel because Zarephath is expressly said to belong to Sidon (1 Ki 17:9). Strikingly, she is the one who invokes Yahweh as the living God, something that is part of a consistent pattern in this chapter of showing non-Israelites understanding that Yahweh is the one who provides life (Firth 2019:147–150). Nevertheless, the significance of this for her initially seems ironic because in response to Elijah's request for water that she was gathering wood to prepare what she believed would be the final meal she and her son would eat before dying (1 Ki 17:12). Although not employing the vocabulary of life, Elijah's response indicates that if she provides for him, then Yahweh would continue to provide sustenance for her and her

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76. For the purposes of this paper, we have avoided introducing use of נפשׁ to the discussion because of its semantic flexibility. Here, however, it clearly stands for David's life, though perhaps seen in the concrete rather than abstract.

son until the drought ended, something the narrator confirms to be true (1 Ki 17:16). In the face of death, it is Yahweh who has provided life, a theme that takes on particular significance when we appreciate that this was a region noted for Baal worship (Fensham 1980; cf. Dharamraj 2011:13).

The importance of Yahweh as a provider of life here is not restricted to the provision of food because the next story recounts the death of the woman's son (1 Ki 17:17–24). There is a tragic irony here because he has been sustained by Yahweh's provision to this point, and yet now he dies from an illness. This triggers an angry response from the woman who claims Elijah has brought her sin to remembrance and thus caused her son's death. Although she does not speak of Yahweh, in context it is clear she believes Yahweh has killed her son to punish her. This is a distortion of Hannah's prayer, but one that is easily imaginable. Yet in response to Elijah's threefold cry, Yahweh grants life again to the boy (with the verb חיה here having the sense of 'come to life again' and thus extending the previously demonstrated meaning of 'restore to health'). This event not only leads to the woman confessing Yahweh, but also provides the first example of Yahweh's act of giving life being more than the birth of a child as now life is given to the dead. What might have seemed like hyperbole in Hannah's prayer now becomes reality. Yahweh is shown to be the true God as he, and not Baal, gives life (cf. Schmid 2000:531). Although we cannot explore this further here, this motif becomes an important one in the Elisha stories too (2 Ki 4:18–30).

Likewise, the oath formula 'as Yahweh live' recurs several times in the Elijah and Elisha stories (including the Micaiah story), but not outside them. That is, although the oath formula is relatively common within Kings, it is restricted to the Solomon narrative and the Elijah – Elisha cycle. Elsewhere in Kings, the noun typically occurs with the sense of existing and hence not being dead. This more restrictive use of the vocabulary is also notable for the fact that in such contexts Yahweh does not often feature in the dialogue in which the noun occurs.

The initial instance of this usage in Kings is seen in 1 Kings 3:16–28, the account of how Solomon determined which of two women who claimed a living child was theirs spoke truthfully. The contrast throughout this story of life and death is clearly limited in meaning to which child was not dead. This more restrictive sense is the most frequent use of the noun in Kings and is notable for its lack of express reference to Yahweh. Indeed, in the Naboth story, it is precisely because Yahweh's commitment to life that Ahab was able to claim his vineyard is being ignored (1 Ki 21:15). Elijah's subsequent encounter makes clear the fact that Yahweh will take Ahab's life because of this, though this is deferred because of his act of repentance (1 Ki 21:17–29). Nevertheless, there is an important variation to the dominant pattern in the account of the Assyrian invasion during Hezekiah's reign (2 Ki 18–19). Although the oath formula is absent, in both his message to Isaiah (2 Ki 19:4)

and his prayer (2 Ki 19:16), Hezekiah refers to Yahweh as the living God. Here, the concern expressed both times is that the Assyrians had mocked (חרף) the living God. This language echoes David's encounter with Goliath (1 Sm 17:26, 36), part of a number of connections between these stories (cf. Provan 1988:91–132), so that the Assyrians are seen to follow the pattern of Goliath. There is, however, an additional link to Hannah's prayer in Hezekiah's description of Judah's distress when he observes that children had come to the point of birth, but there was no strength for them to be born. Yet, by the end of the story, albeit after several years of struggle, Isaiah has made clear the fact that life will be renewed in Judah (2 Ki 19:29–31). The life which it seemed the Assyrians were preventing could not be restrained, and Yahweh would again grant life, this time through the defeat of Assyria and the restoration of the land.

■ Usage of the verb חָיָה in Kings

As with Samuel, the noun is more common in Kings than the verb, though Kings has a higher level of usage of the verb here than Samuel. There is still a significant overlap with the usage in Samuel, but there are nuances developed here that are not evident in Samuel.

As noted above, one element of the verb which was absent in Samuel (though we saw evidence for it in Joshua and Judges) is where it refers to the recovery of health. In Joshua 5:8 and Judges 15:19, it occurs in reference to a physical limitation caused either by minor surgery or exertion. In both cases, the verb חיה describes a return to normal vitality. This sense is certainly present in Elisha's encounter with Hazael (2 Ki 8:10, 14), with the clear implication that it was Yahweh who would grant healing. However, having announced this to Hazael, Elisha also pointed out to him that Yahweh had shown to him that Hazael would kill Ben-hadad, as in fact he did the day after he reported back to him. This story shows a typical feature of the Elijah and Elisha stories, where various kings want the affirmation that they shall live only to die. Of course, in the case of Amaziah it does not help that he seeks this information from Baal-zebub (2 Ki 1:2), which is why Elijah can announce to him that he will die. Seeking healing from a god other than Yahweh is the way to death, and neither can worshippers of other deities be trusted to work with Yahweh to bring restoration. By contrast, in response to his prayer and notwithstanding the previous announcement of his death, Hezekiah could be restored to health by Yahweh (2 Ki 20:1–7).

Nevertheless, as noted in our discussion of the noun, Kings is notable for using the verb חיה to refer not only to restoration of health for the living, but also to restoration of life to the dead. We have already noted this in the case of the widow of Zarephath's son and the Shunnamite woman (though this revival is also significant in 2 Ki 8:1–6), so we need to simply note the account

in 2 Kings 13:21 where the man thrown into Elisha's grave was restored to life. Yahweh is not mentioned here, but within the larger context of the report of Elisha's death it is clear that this restoration of life is presented as evidence of Yahweh's power in providing life.

Beyond these passages, the other instances of the verb are consistent with what was seen in Samuel. Hence, we find several instances of the phrase 'Long live the king' (e.g. 1 Ki 1:25, 31, 34, 49; 2 Ki 11:12), and various points where the verb refers to continued existence (e.g. 2 Ki 7:4). As noted for Samuel, the wish for the king to live clearly presumes that this should be given by Yahweh. However, given the relatively formulaic use of such language, significant conclusions should not be drawn.

■ Conclusion

Tracing the theme of life through the Former Prophets represents a close reading of a long stretch of text. Obviously, what we have explored here provides only a brief survey, and with those texts read only from a synchronic perspective. Moreover, although we have separated the nominal and verbal forms for Samuel and Kings, this is only to aid analysis as these need to be seen in light of each other.

Certain summary observations can be made. First, life as an important theme that only emerges in Samuel and Kings. It is a minor theme in Joshua and barely features in Judges. Nevertheless, Hannah's prayer can be seen as providing a hermeneutical key for exploring this motif. As the prayer notes, it is Yahweh who grants life and it is, in the ultimate sense, Yahweh who kills. Hannah's own story provides a pattern for exploring this as the one who has no child but to whom Yahweh grants a child. In doing so, Yahweh grants life to Hannah. Beyond this, it becomes clear that her experience of life is enriched by what Yahweh does for her so that we see the life that she lives is more than simple existence – life can have this basic meaning, but when Yahweh is involved something more fulfilling is normally suggested. By contrast, the sons of Eli are put to death by Yahweh for their sin, showing the other side of this pattern. As we survey the use of both the noun and verb across the Former Prophets, it is this pattern that is developed, but by the time we reach Kings it is developed in unexpected ways as Yahweh grants life outside of the boundaries of Israel and also restores life even to the dead. In an ironic twist on this, in the Naaman story this is something recognised by Israel's king (2 Ki 5:7), except that he does not see that Yahweh is indeed present to grant life whereas Elisha does (2 Ki 5:6). Gehazi, however, misunderstands this as an opportunity to enrich himself (2 Ki 5:20), but in so doing forgets that it is Yahweh who grants life. Once again, the themes established by Hannah's prayer guide our reading of this motif.

Life in the Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel

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■ Introduction

The usage of a noun and verb describing the concepts of life and living appears very often in the Major Prophets. What is striking is the distribution of these occurrences in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel which comprises 166 chapters. So frequent is the occurrence that one can say that it is found almost once in each of the chapters. From this, the following questions arise: Why does it occur so frequently in these books and what is the theological significance thereof?

These questions will be answered as follows: First, all the occurrences of the concept will be considered. This will be done to determine the extent to which the occurrences are semantically similar because חיה and חַי do not only have a single possible meaning. Another word that needs consideration in the study of life is נֶפֶשׁ which is used in conjunction with חיה. Investigation of נֶפֶשׁ though will be limited to a selected few instances which will be indicated.

If a clear grouping can be made, it will be indicated first. From these clustered possible meanings, representative passages will then be selected and exegetically examined. The facets taken into account during the exegesis will be:

1. context (historical and literary)
2. the structure of the passage
3. the language in the passage
4. what the passage reveals about God
5. which theological deductions can be made from all these facets?

Lastly a conclusion will be drawn to encapsulate the findings.

■ Distribution of חיה and חי in the Major Prophets

According to a search by means of the 'Bible Word study' option of the computer program Logos, חיה [be alive] appears 30 times in Isaiah, 33 times in Jeremiah and 105 times in Ezekiel. The occurrence of חַי [living] is as follows: 11 times in Isaiah, 10 times in Jeremiah and 46 times in Ezekiel. If a calculation is done based on this information, the following is observed as far as appearance of the notion is concerned: Isaiah = 41, Jeremiah = 43, and Ezekiel = 151.

According to the count of Gerleman (1997b:412–413), the distribution of חיה and חַי is as shown in Table 6.1.

■ The notion of חיה and חי in the Major Prophets grouped together

From the sources mentioned earlier it can be seen that they provide different numbers for the occurrence of חיה and חי. In order to make sure that the theme is properly investigated throughout the Major Prophets, all the occurrences of the concept of life and living were traced in the NRSV. From that the following semantic fields were derived where חיה or חַי appeared in the Hebrew text (Table 6.2). Some instances where the root נֶפֶשׁ is used in the immediate context of חיה or חַי and where 'life' is implied, were also considered. Because of the limited space available it is not possible to conduct an exhaustive study of all

TABLE 6.1: The distribution of חיה and חַי in the Major Prophets.

Prophets	Qal	pi.	hi.	_ḥay_	_ḥayyâ_	II	_ḥayyîm_	Total
Isaiah	7	1	3	8	6	1	4	**30**
Jeremiah	9	1	–	16	3	–	4	**33**
Ezekiel	43	4	1	24	31	2	2	**107**

Source: Gerleman (1997b:412–413).

TABLE 6.2: Sub-themes related to life in the Major Prophets.

Book	Sub-themes					
	The living God	Dead versus alive	What leads to being alive	Being alive	Spiritual life in representing God	Exchange of life
Isaiah	23:26 37:4,17 49:18	8:19 26:14,19 38:1,9,19	38:16 55:3	4:3 7:21 38:11,12, 20 53:8	38:16 57.15	43:4 (נֶפֶשׁ)
Jeremiah	4:2 5:2 10:10 12:16 16:14,15 22:24 23.36 38:16,17 44:26 46:18	8:3 21:8,9 27:12; 17 38:2 42:17, 22; 44:12,14,28 49:16	2:13 17:13 21:8: 27:12,17 38:2,17,20 39:18 49:11	11:19 18:20 19:7,9; 29:5,28 35:7,11 42:15 43:2,5 52:33,34	11:21 (נֶפֶשׁ)	-
Ezekiel	5:11 14:16,18,20 16:48 17:16,19 18:3 20:3 33:11,27 34:8 35:6	7:13 13:19 18:13,17, 23,32 33:11 37:3–14	3:18,21 13:19,22 14:20; 16:6 18:9,19–22, 24,27, 28 20:11, 13, 21, 25 33:5,11, 12,13, 16,19	1:5–22 7:13 32:23–27, 32 37:3,5,9,14 45:5 47:9	13:18,19	-

the passages that mention life in the Major Prophets. A comparative study may however yield fruitful results. In Table 6.2 occurrences of the word 'life' are documented with the purpose to identify sub-themes.

From Table 6.2 the following six sub-themes concerning life and living can be identified in the Major Prophets:

1. God as the living God.
2. Dead compared to being alive.
3. What leads to being alive.
4. Being alive.
5. Spiritual life in representing God.
6. Life in exchange.

Many of the occurrences in Ezekiel are bundled together in fewer passages and thus it appears that the theme of life and living is developed in greater depth in Ezekiel but more broadly in Isaiah and Jeremiah.

■ Overview of the meaning of the concept of life in the Major Prophets

According to Gerleman (1997a:411), the verb חיה is well developed in the West-Semitic realm and appears in Hebrew in the qal, pi`el and hi`phil. Amongst the

nouns derived from the verb one finds, first of all, the substantive and adjective חַי/'life' which expresses both 'lively' and 'alive'. As far as the adjective חַי is concerned, it describes the ability to act and that which has absolute being (Swanson 1997b).

The basic meaning of the verb, which is found most often in the qal, is 'to be', or 'to remain alive'. The opposite of being 'dead' [מות] is always implied even if it is not explicitly expressed. In those passages in which it describes a situation which is not continuous but momentary, an altered meaning is found. An example of this is Hezekiah's recovery from sickness which is described as 'coming to life again'. The meaning thus relates to the fact that in the Old Testament 'life' does not merely mean 'to be alive', but that being 'alive' implies a complete and fulfilled life. In the pi`el and hi`phil the meaning is distinct in the sense that the pi`el gives more prominence to the difference between life and death while the hi`phil expresses the weakened concept of its duration.

In some passages חַיִּים and נֶפֶשׁ appear almost as interchangeable terms. The difference between the two is usually clear and primarily lies in the higher degree of objectivisation that seems inherent in the term חַיִּים. In contrast to נֶפֶשׁ, חַיִּים is not considered an inherent, life-related principle, but a possession or, more properly, a good gift. A person's life is therefore identical with being a creature of God and one recognises oneself as God's creature through one's existence. Because life is continually threatened, however, it can be promised anew.

As far as life as a gift from God is concerned, Burge (2008:661) adds that life is not an inherent human quality possessed independently of God. It was given to humans at creation, and again at redemption. Life is therefore not a by-product of nature with God as a minor accompaniment. Rather, the dualistic notion that the natural and spiritual world is separate from one another, is not found in the Biblical view of life. Life is squarely embedded in creation and cannot be found apart from it. It is because of this integrated understanding of life in the Hebrew world that the notion was not seen as either biological or spiritual but as the totality of the living experience. Even though the notion of life is integrated as explained above, the use of נֶפֶשׁ and רוּחַ denotes the part of life which is lost at death. This does not refer to the loss of a component of life at death but rather signifies the conclusion of a person's existence. When נֶפֶשׁ [spirit] is ultimately breathed out, it means that the aspect which is characteristic of that person, is not there anymore.

Steiner (2015:78) aptly describes it as follows: 'Although the נֶפֶשׁ is not a part of the body, it is a part of the person'.

Thus, when the capabilities of thinking, feeling, praying and being, are lost, life is lost because the fullness which is characteristic of life in the Hebrew sense is not recognisable anymore. It is for this reason that idolatry is scorned

in the Old Testament because the living God, as the source of life, is denied and replaced by something in which real existence is absent.

It is for this reason that the Torah does more than acknowledge physical life. It introduces life by briefly describing its inception. As a result of God's creative activity, both animals and people are 'living creatures'. In this sense, all animate nature is on a similar standing because it was created by God. While most translations imply that Genesis 2:7 differs to a certain extent from Genesis 1:20 and 1:24, the Hebrew is the same in each instance by designating all living creatures with the phrase נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה [living soul]. What separates human beings from the animal world though, is that Genesis 1:27 states twice that they are living souls created 'in the image of God'. In this sense, human life is a representation of the life of God where humans were able to show the communicable attributes of God. This can only be accomplished from a correct relationship with God where the standards in his word are adhered to.

Ringren (1983:324–344) adds to this by stating that life comes through keeping the commandments. This is especially expressed in Deuteronomy 4:

> So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. (v. 1)

For Israel, 'life' is thus associated with the statutes and ordinances of Yahweh and with possession of the Promised Land which is the 'Lebensraum' that God gave them in order to serve him and live life to the fullest. What is of further importance, as far as the possible meaning of life is concerned, is the notion of national life for Israel. In the prophets, Israel is often portrayed as a corporate personality where the life of one is dependent on the life of the people, and the life of the people is dependent on the actions of the individual members of God's people. This comes especially to the fore in the passages where the servant of Yahweh and the watchman are in the centre.

■ Passages representing finer nuances in the notion of life

■ God as the living God (Is 37:4, 17)

The selected verses are considered to be the most representative of the concept under discussion as they contain the greatest amount of information from all the identified verses because of the polemical nature of the chapters in which they appear. The context of the passage is the Assyrian king Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. During the siege, it became clear from the way he challenged Hezekiah, that he had the same perception about Yahweh as he had about the gods of other lands. If the gods of the lands he had conquered could not deliver their regions from his hands, how would Yahweh be able to deliver his city, namely the city of Jerusalem (Is 36:18–20)? It needs

to be mentioned that this is the only instance in the Bible where Yahweh is bound by anyone to a fixed domain.

In the continuous narrative, the Rabshakeh adapts his negotiating techniques to what he sees as the actual weakness of the enemy which is the presumed inability of Yahweh to deliver Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib (Childs 2001:276).

When Hezekiah heard what the Rabshakeh said, mocking Yahweh by implying that he is inactive, he responds twice by stating that 'the living God was mocked' (Is 37:4, 17). This is reminiscent of the narrative of David and Goliath when Yahweh acted on behalf of his people. It is therefore not unexpected that Hezekiah reacts in such a manner that the senses of Yahweh are called upon.

The first action of Hezekiah is to ascertain himself with the contents of the letters from the Assyrians which the messengers brought to him. After he had read them, he went to the house of the Lord where he spread them out before him. This is clearly an action that implies that God is capable of taking note of what was written. It is therefore not necessary to read the letters aloud to bring it to his attention as the custom had been in Old Testament times (Roberts 2015:454). Just bringing the contents to the attention of Yahweh by showing it to him is a confession about Yahweh as well as an act of reliance on him. The act in itself is an expression of prayer which is followed by adding words of prayer. In the first place it acknowledges God in Isaiah 37:16 as the one whom revealed himself as the sovereign ruler over all his creation, binding himself through covenant to Israel as his people (Goldingay 2012:211).

In verse 17, five imperatives are used to request Yahweh to turn his ear to the speaker and hear his plea. Thereafter he should open his eyes and perceive what is happening. 'Listen, hear and see' are therefore accumulated in one sentence to indicate Yahweh's potential activity as the ruler of nature and history. Hezekiah is thus not arguing against idol worship but against Sennacherib's degrading portrayal of the living God. The issue which Hezekiah puts into perspective is that Sennacherib did not defeat mighty gods in his conquest of other nations, but mere people depending on inactive creations of humans, labelled as 'gods'. Thus the Assyrians were robbed of their own presumed fear-inspiring superhuman character, in favour of the living God (Smith 2007:619).

When Hezekiah refers to the living God (אלהים חי), it does not stand in contrast to the fertility gods who presumably die and rise again. The contrast between the dead idols and the living God is demonstrated in Yahweh's ability to protect his people in the city which he had given them to live in (Watts 2005b:574). What is of particular importance is the manner in which the Assyrian king thought about the gods and the associations they had. In Isaiah 36:20

Sennacherib declares a clear connection, perceived from his perspective, that gods and their geographical lands are linked to one another. In contrast, Hezekiah makes it clear that God is not bound to any territory but instead is enthroned above the cherubim. He is also not committed to a geographical area, but to people. He is therefore, not Yahweh of the land of Israel, but 'Yahweh of hosts, God of Israel' [יְהֹוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל]. With 'Israel', he indicates the people belonging to the nation of Israel whom God created out of no specific nation (cf. Ezk 16:1–6). Yahweh is therefore alive in a sense that no other god is alive. As far as the other nations and their gods are concerned, they were 'alive' because they were produced by nations and perceived to be alive in the hearts and minds of their creators. Yahweh, on the contrary is not of human origin but the creator of all. Brueggemann (1997:54) therefore asserts that the Assyrian autonomy is countered by Yahweh when he rebukes Sennacherib in a speech that is dominated by first-person claims of him acting as well as speaking in real life.

It is in this sense that Hezekiah turns to Yahweh with the request, not to save the city of Jerusalem, but to save them as his people to whom he has bound Himself in covenant. When he delivers them from the hands of the king of Assyria, not only will it show that the gods of Assyria are in fact not active, but that Yahweh is the only living God and that he should be exalted. Oswalt (1986:654) makes a fine conclusion to this when he says: 'If the creature is exalted, salvation is impossible'.

Yahweh is no creature and therefore his prophet Isaiah sends a message to Hezekiah that he has heard his prayer concerning Sennacherib. In the message to Hezekiah, Yahweh puts the situation in perspective. Just as the prayer of Hezekiah was completely focused on God, so is the answer of Isaiah. In this answer, Yahweh reiterates his sovereignty over and against the inferiority of Sennacherib. While Sennacherib assumed that he was unbeatable in his endeavours, the fact is that history is under the supreme control of Yahweh (Motyer 1999:281).

Despite the statement of Ringren (1983:322–324) that the meaning of the expression the living God (אֱלֹהִים חָי) is not entirely clear, the opposite is clear from the earlier discussion. God is shown as acting in an absolute way towards people to whom he has bound himself. He is completely in control of everything, even of the calamities which Hezekiah and the people of Judah suffer at the hands of Sennacherib. All this happens in such a way that Hezekiah calls upon the character of God which had become known through his past and present actions. The theological significance is thus that God is present and acting from the vantage point of not being confined by any limitation. Yet he acts on behalf of his people in such a way that a future becomes possible for them. Thus, God as the 'living God' makes himself known as such because of the relationship he established between himself and his people.

■ 'Dead' compared to being 'alive' (Is 26:14, 19)

When an overview is done of the verses in which death and life are contrasted, it is remarkable how many times it occurs in Jeremiah. However, the vast majority of the verses deal with the similar warning to the people about the coming exile in which many will die, but if they submit to Babylon, they would live. The section from the Major Prophets where death and life features repetitively is the vision in Ezekiel 37:3–14. Not only does this passage deal with the situation after the onset of the Babylonian exile, but the vision also includes the role of רוּחַ (spirit) in life. However, there is another passage in which life and death are very clearly discussed in such a way that the meaning of both mentioned situations becomes clear, and that is in Isaiah 26:14,19.

As far as the outline is concerned, Isaiah 26 forms part of the so-called 'Isaiah Apocalypse' found in Isaiah 24–27. These poetic chapters contain a mixture of prophecies, prayers, laments and songs of praise and thanksgiving. All of these are associated with the judgement of God over the corrupt world. For the faithful remnant though, renewal is foreseen. One of the two references in the Old Testament to bodily resurrection can also be found in Isaiah 26:19 (cf. Dan 12:2) (Fee & Hubbard 2011:391). As these two verses from Isaiah encompass the subject under discussion, they will receive the primary focus.

As far as the genre of the different parts of the apocalypse is concerned, an array of viewpoints is found amongst leading scholars of Isaiah. Amongst these the viewpoint of Childs (2001) will be taken because it sheds comprehensive light on the discussion:

> In sum, chapter 26 offers a great variety of conventional forms, but in the end it results in a highly theological presentation directed to the faithful, who testify to the effect of God's victory, yet still experience the full weight of divine and human judgement. God's salvation has been truly experienced; his righteous rule is confessed. Yet ultimately salvation is depicted in terms that transcend any one experience. Chapter 25 speaks of a life removed from death, while chapter 26 speaks of the promise of resurrection to life even after the suffering of death. (p. 189)

With the summary of Childs in mind, we can focus firstly on Isaiah 26:14 where death and life are contrasted. In this verse mention is made of the dead that do not live because they were punished. There is no direct reference in verse 14 of who the punished one(s) was/were, but it is clear from previous verses that everything is undertaken by Yahweh (Motyer 1999:216).

As was said under the general discussion in the introduction, 'life' is often contrasted with 'death' and this passage can be approached from the point of view of 'death' as is often done in commentaries. Although the focus of this study is on 'life', much can be learned from the inverse of 'life' in this verse, namely 'death'. The dead are no more and they are not remembered either. On the other hand, those that are alive through the activity of Yahweh will live in

a special way because they will be able to enjoy the blessings of God's goodness, undisturbed by their former tyrants. There is thus no continuity in the characteristics of the former oppressors. However, the opposite is portrayed in the verses that follow on Isaiah 26:14. In these verses, the following is mentioned: Yahweh increased the nation (גּוֹי) and enlarged all the borders of the land. The people in the land prayed to Yahweh in distress. The fact that he is addressed as 'Yahweh our God' in verse 13 should not be overlooked because it portrays the personal relationship between the Lord and themselves. These actions of Yahweh on behalf of his people define 'life' in terms of relationship to one another and to their territory (Clements 1977:426). It also involves a relationship with Yahweh to whom they could cry out. 'Life' therefore, returns for them as it returned for Hezekiah, but without the threat of oppression. 'Life' is therefore related to a relationship with Yahweh and with what he provides, which in this case, is a living space as well as people to share it with (Kaiser 1987:212).

Before taking a closer look at verse 19, it will be fitting to take a closer look at the way Brueggemann (1998b:207) summarises verses 7–15. He states that it is evident that the rich imagery used in the entire development of verses 7–15 has as purpose the positioning of the righteous as the special ones of Yahweh who put their trust only in him. All of this is, however, a preparation for the complaint in verses 16–17 in which the righteous turn to Yahweh in complete trust. Israel, however, was praying like a woman in labour but without the outcome of bearing a child which will open the future. Instead, only her anguish remains likened to that of a woman undergoing the pain of childbirth. There is no deliverance or intervention and all that they can do, is to wait on their God. This causes a liturgical pause which Brueggemann describes as actually more than liturgical, and in fact, cosmic. The community of faith consequently waits on the only alternative power it knows and trusts. The answer to their anguish and waiting is then given in verse 19.

When the answer comes it declares a glorious contrast for Israel, not only with regard to her dead former tyrants but also with her own unfruitful endeavours to bear spiritual fruit (Is 26:17–18).

The answer verse 19 provides, starts with: 'Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise'. It is significant that the 'dead' are identified as belonging to Israel as well as to Yahweh. This does not oppose the statement in verse 14 that the dead do not live. That was said in reference to foreign masters whom Yahweh had condemned to be forgotten. Thus the God of Israel determined their fate as well. The oppressors will have no remembrance because Yahweh had determined it. On the other hand, he also determined that those belonging to Israel, will live (Watts 2005a:342)!

However, this verse not only states a contrast between Israel's past and present, but also between life and death when it announces a belief in

resurrection from the dead. It is also not the only passage in the Old Testament where it is stated. In Daniel 12:2 and in Ezekiel 37 the same concept is found. While it is found in a vision in Ezekiel 37 and should therefore be explained as such, the reference in Daniel 12 is to a physical rising from the dust.

In order to settle the question of whether 26:19 should be understood as relating to a spiritual or physical resurrection, the answer lies in the fact that the metaphorical always rests on the literal. Verse 19 commences with the literal statement: 'Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise' (Grogan 2008:635). With these words Isaiah returns to the theme of physical resurrection from the dead (Is 25:8).

The force with which the reversal from death to life is portrayed, comes with the use of נְבֵלָה [corpses]. By using נְבֵלָה, much more is said than a mere reference to a dead body. In the first instance, the resurrection of the body is in fact a triumph over death because death is regarded to be an enemy in the Old Testament. In the second instance, the curse of which the prophets often make mention, namely to go unburied when you die, is also lifted by resurrection (Alexander 1998:14). The effect of this is to be free from death as the major enemy, as well as being welcomed into the circle of the blessed where none of the accursed is welcome (cf. Is 26:20).

The reference to 'dew' in verse 19c has a wide metaphorical meaning, but according to Motyer (1999:217), it is significantly linked to the 'manna' of Exodus 16 which was the divine gift of Yahweh by which he cancelled the threat of death by starvation.

The basic point which is made, is that the ultimate status of the community of faith in Israel is not controlled by the rules of all the previous ages. The essence of the new era is not the absence of pain and misery, but the promised life in God's kingdom extending even beyond the grave. For the first time in the Old Testament it is expressed that the light of God penetrates even into death. It is therefore not accidental that in both Judaism and Christianity the belief in God's ultimate victory has as a cornerstone of faith the confession that God makes a new beginning out of death into life (Childs 2001:192).

Brueggemann (1998b:209) aptly remarks that all this is not a statement about immortality or death as the onset of new life for humanity, but a proclamation about God who swallowed death. He did this because there is no boundary beyond which Yahweh will not go in response to his faithful people. This proclamation makes sense not in a strict scientific way, but for the righteous who acknowledge God alone.

The confidence in God's resurrective power can therefore be considered to be the logical conclusion of the key points of faith in the Old Testament, namely that God is life and that a life lived in relationship with him brings

blessings in such a way that it leads to joy (Oswalt 1986:486). Life is thus to be lived in praise to Yahweh for the privilege to remain in his presence.

By way of conclusion Nsiku (2010:853) gives an important African perspective on this verse when he calls attention to the fact that many African healers, witch doctors and fearsome sorcerers try to convince their clients and victims that the power over life and death lies with them. Isaiah though, insists that it is only the Lord who has the power to bring death to the sinner and restore the dead to life and that he is the master of history.

■ What leads to being alive

The passages mentioned further were selected because they have a common aspect, namely God speaking, accompanied with an expected reaction from the hearer.

The verses in diachronic order are:

- Jeremiah 21:8–9 and 39:18 where the people are taught that God sets the way of life before them and they have to trust him for that.
- Ezekiel 3:18–21 where the wicked are called to righteousness in order to save their lives.
- Isaiah 55:3 which contains the central thought present in all the verses, namely, that listening to God brings life.

In order to enhance the understanding of the texts to be discussed, it will be investigated in diachronic order.

▢ Jeremiah 21:8–9 and 39:18

Jeremiah 21:8–9 and 39:18 are dated to the time of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah (597 BC–586 BC). Here Jeremiah sets before the people the way of life and the way of death by bringing the message that Zedekiah and Judah will be given over in the hands of the Babylonian king and that they should not resist him. The reason for this was Zedekiah's rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, whose vassal he was, by refusing to pay the tribute owed. The motivation for the rebellion was the tendency of Israel to look in the direction of Egypt for help against the Babylonian enemy. The reality was that no help would arrive for Judah from anybody anymore, because Yahweh had already decided that he would deliver his people into the hands of their enemy because they continually breeched the conditions of the covenant (cf. Jer 21:7, 27:8–12).

With bitter irony Jeremiah delivers the same message, as Moses did many years before, by setting in front of the people of God the way of life and the way of death (Dt 30:15–20). The irony is that with Moses a new beginning was on the horizon. The people were on the verge of conquering the Promised Land (Brown 2010:296). With Jeremiah's message the opposite is true because

they were on the verge of losing the Promised Land. The abundant life they were supposed to find in the land because of adherence to the covenant, did not materialise because of their continuous transgression of the stipulations of the covenant (Mackay 2017:21). Covenant fidelity on the side of Judah would mean fidelity from Yahweh to protect them against their enemies. Paradoxically, Yahweh's fidelity to the covenant leads him to remove Judah from the Promised Land in accordance with the requirements of the covenant (cf. Dt 29:28). In Jeremiah 39, a description is given of how this happened. When in exile, life for the people of God would be related to Yahweh alone and not to the promised land as living space. Even though Judah would be in Babylon as exiles, they would not be detached from Yahweh because Nebuchadnezzar was only the sword in the hand of their own God. Yahweh would chastise the people of Judah through Nebuchadnezzar and the successive kings of Babylon. Even though the Babylonian king would overrun Jerusalem, he would not hold the power over Judah because of the sovereignty of the Lord who is not confined to the temple in Jerusalem.

It is because of this oracle that Jeremiah was considered a Babylonian collaborator. Seen from a covenantal perspective he was not anti-Judah but pro-God, who was using the Babylonians temporarily to inflict punishment as required by the covenant he had made with Israel (Longman 2012:152). If the people of Judah would acknowledge their contravention of the covenant and accept the discipline of God they would at least stay alive and in the presence of God, although in Babylon. On the other hand, if they resisted God's punishment, they would lose their lives in rebellion to Yahweh. While the decision was made that they would be removed from the promised land, their lives would continue in exile where God would teach them anew who he is.

It is on this note that trust in Yahweh is required as is conveyed in Jeremiah 39:18. The notion of trust was not new in this context. In Isaiah 30:15,16 it is proclaimed that strength does not lie in the power of horses or the military but in trust in Yahweh. Zedekiah experienced first-hand the effect of his distrust in the words of Yahweh which Jeremiah had brought. As Zedekiah was attempting to flee from the king of Babylon (precisely what Jeremiah had warned him not to do) he lost his sons who were slaughtered, and he lost his eyes as well.

Contrary to the behaviour and subsequent outcome of the life of Zedekiah, was that of Ebed-melech who previously had been instrumental in saving Jeremiah's life. Jeremiah was sent to him with a message from Yahweh that the outcome for him would be different. Although the placement of the text containing Jeremiah's message to Ebed-melech is under contention, it makes perfect sense. If it is considered in terms of chronological sequence it follows upon 38:13. Mackay (2017:372) describes the placement of the oracle not as a displacement though, but as a way to deliberately contrast Zedekiah's distrust

in Yahweh with Ebed-melech's trust in him. The practical outcome of distrusting and trusting the Lord is thus juxtaposed. Even though Ebed-melech was in the service of Zedekiah, it was not death that awaited him, but his life as שָׁלָל [spoils of war]. Yet the spoils of war is not Ebed-melech's, but Yahweh's to the benefit of the one who trusts him. Within the flow of events it could have been expected that Ebed-melech would perish together with Zedekiah, but Yahweh took his life from the hands of the enemy and gave it back to him. It can therefore be agreed with Stulman (2005:320) that 'God's rule is not removed from history but is hidden within it'. This can be seen from the way in which he announced the exile, brought it into effect and saved the very lives of those taking his word as trustworthy.

☐ Ezekiel 3:18–21

While Jeremiah announced the exile in the passage discussed above, and also described the onset of the Babylonian exile, Ezekiel's audience was already in exile, as indicated by their presence at the river Chebar (Ezk 3:15). They probably regarded their judgement as irrevocable and therefore considered Ezekiel's admonition of little interest. At this stage there were still Judeans remaining in the promised land who may have thought that they had escaped God's judgement and so also failed to take Ezekiel's warnings seriously (Fee & Hubbard 2011:425).

It is to these people that Ezekiel is sent as a watchman with specific responsibilities. The responsibilities outlined in Ezekiel 3:16–21 should be read in conjunction with Ezekiel 33:1–9 which portrays the specific function of a watchman in more detail. What is of importance for the subject under discussion, is the difference which the watchman made with regard to life and death. The difference that the watchman has to make, is linked to the transmission of a message. As in the case of Jeremiah, whose message also made the difference between life and death, so it is with Ezekiel (Mackay 2018:143). In the case of Ezekiel, however, it is not surrender that is required as it was with Jeremiah, but repentance. Ezekiel's message is addressed to the wicked who would surely die. However, there is a way by which the wicked can escape death and that is by turning away from their wicked [רָשָׁע] ways. With the use of רָשָׁע [wicked] there is a focus on being guilty of transgressing a certain standard which makes you liable to punishment by law. This transgression is always against God or persons. The opposite of רָשָׁע is צָדַק [righteous] and therefore it is indicated in 3:20 that the צַדִּיק [righteous] will not die (Carpenter & Grisanti 1998:1204).

It is clear from the context of 3:18–20 that 'life' and 'righteousness' are directly correlated. Even though a number of synonyms are used to describe what leads to death, 'righteousness' is constantly linked to 'life', in these verses.

It is consequently necessary to have a closer look at the contextual meaning of צַדִּיק. As far as the meaning of צַדִּיק is concerned, Reimer (1998:746) notes that the semantic nuance of צַדִּיק is better derived from context than from morphology. Theological considerations will therefore dominate the understanding of righteousness. In general, צֶדֶק terms deal with behaviour within relationships for which a certain standard is set. The standard which is set in theological terms is set by God and is related to his attributes. He expects righteous behaviour from his people because he is righteous. It is for this reason that transgression of the covenant will have dire consequences.

Koch (1997:1059) explains 'righteousness' in Ezekiel as a call to return from evil to the socially faithful way which requires adherence to a series of apodictic commandments.

If all is considered with regards to what makes one live, the following deductions can be made as far as 'righteousness' in Ezekiel 3 is concerned: 'Righteousness' is primarily associated with behavioural conduct within the relationship between God and his people as well as between the individuals that the community comprises of. The required standard for conduct is set by God in accordance with his character.

When the standard set by God is observed, it opens up the sphere of living to such an extent that both the prophet and his audience could have 'fullness of being and could thus become truly human' (Mackay 2018:148).

What can be gathered then from the task God gave Ezekiel as far as life is concerned, is the following: As God is personally involved in the lives of individuals, he sends Ezekiel to Judah not only as a people with a corporate personality, but simultaneously as individuals. The mission of Ezekiel attests to the attributes of God which are applicable in these circumstances, namely: faithfulness in keeping the covenant; care for his people because he does not find delight in the death of anyone (cg. Ezk 18:32) and forgiveness when there is repentance. If people lived in agreement with these attributes of God within the community, there would not only be continuity of life but a completeness in the life God grants humans.

What is essential in receiving life though, is receiving the message given to the prophets by God. The next passage to be discussed deals with that topic.

☐ Isaiah 55:3

The background of chapter 55 is the announcement of forgiveness in Isaiah 54, but in view of the discussion conducted earlier, it is also the culmination of all that is prophesied. Chapter 54 sets the table for everyone to come to water, wine and milk, and therefore no less than 12 imperatives or jussives can be found in the first seven verses of the chapter. For those in exile a new beginning is possible. The bride is restored and the city rebuilt and there are new

possibilities even for those without any resources – a situation very relevant to the post-exilic community (Oswalt 2003:601).

Isaiah 55:3 then starts with an imperative הַטּוּ by which the command is given that the ears must be turned towards the speaker. This is followed by another imperative that commands the hearer to come to the one speaking. These actions are directly related to the action of hearing, which is the main action to be performed. Paraphrased, it can be put this way: Make ready to hear, come to me and listen! The meaning of שִׁמְעוּ in this verse is not mere hearing but a command to also believe what is said and to respond in such a way that there is submission to the authority of the message that was heard (Swanson 1997c). The purpose of the three mentioned imperatives is that it should lead to life for the hearer (literally – your soul may live). What was thus a metaphor in Isaiah 55:1, namely 'Come to the water', has now in reality become 'Come to Me'. God himself is the feast to come to and where true life is to be found. As humans are nourished by bread in their physical existence, so are they nourished in their spiritual existence by the Word of God, and therefore by God himself (Motyer 1999:453).

The fact that there can be a readiness to hear the call to listen, is in itself related to a life-giving act. When the command is given Isaiah 55:3 to listen, it is in direct contradiction to the message Isaiah was told to convey in Isaiah 6:10. In the vision of his commission, Isaiah received the task to convey a message to Israel and Judah which they would not be able to hear or comprehend. This message was related to the coming exile which Israel failed to understand. This lack of understanding would be reinforced by the message of Isaiah. It was therefore not possible for Israel to hear and obey until God had brought new life to the ears of his prophet and his people (cf. Is 50:4). Through his proclamation, Isaiah was to be the agent of Yahweh to open the deaf ears of God's people in order for them to see his personal involvement in their lives. When the Word of God is truly heard and internalised, the deeds of God come into perspective because hearing his Word leads to a renewed relationship with him. This new relationship came about when Isaiah called Israel out of Babylon back to the Promised Land where Yahweh would provide life for them (Van der Walt 2014). It was thus in the exile (which Jeremiah told them not to resist) that their dead ears were brought to life in order for them to hear the Word of God and live in a new relationship with him portrayed by his presence at Zion.

The new life that became possible was not the result of any act of Israel but the act of Yahweh who remained faithful to his covenant, especially the unconditional covenant (made with David) mentioned here. This covenant implies Gods kingship over all the ages and just as he wiped out even the memory of the foreign masters, so will he be the sovereign power in the life of his people. Although Israel often tried to find life from the idols (cf. Is 44:6–11),

it was in fact an impotent force (Firth & Williamson 2009:172). To receive the gifts of life that Yahweh has promised, humanity only needs to listen to his word in order to lay claim to the relationship established by him.

The language used here is the language of fidelity rooted in the covenant God made with Abraham and expanded with Israel and David. Life for the people of God lies within the realm of the covenant and not in Babylon. Brueggemann (1998c:159) indicates the contrast between the Babylonian offer of exploitive and oppressive life that denies dignity, freedom and security which is without the presence of joy, with the fidelity of Yahweh. It is not the Davidic agent, though, that will ensure the security and prosperity of the remnant that will return from exile, but the Holy One of Israel. He will be the one who will bestow on them the blessings of the covenant signifying a full life (cf. Dt 32:46, 47).

■ Being alive

The verses representative of this part of the theme, are:

- Isaiah 38:11, 53:8 and Jeremiah 11:19, which represent the repeating sub-theme of 'the land of the living'.
- Ezekiel 37:3, 5, 9, 14 describes the well-known vision of the dry bones coming to life.

□ The land of the living (Is 38:11, 53:8; Jr 11:19)

The expression בְּאֶרֶץ הַחַיִּים [the land of the living] is often found in the Prophets and Psalms. In general, it means life as the opposite of being dead. The expression is directly linked to the cosmological worldview of the ancient Near East which was also shared by Israel. Their understanding of the universe saw it as divided into three tiers namely: heaven as the realm of the deity, earth as the realm of the living and Sheol as the realm of the dead. The land of the living is the sphere where humans live and operate. The way in which humans behave in the land of the living determines their status in the realm of the dead (Block 2014:178). The expression 'land of the living' therefore does not have a theological meaning other than being able to act in the realm of the living and in the presence of Yahweh. The actions of a person in this realm provide the only opportunity available to determine his or her place in the 'afterlife'. When someone's existence is prematurely cut off from the land of the living, the consequence would then be that the full opportunity for establishing a position in the afterlife could not have been utilised.

In the description of the suffering of the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53 the injustices done to him are identified. These injustices withheld him from

experiencing aspects of the ideal life. These injustices, represented as negatives, can provide an indication of aspects of the ideal life. In describing the servant's life, it is portrayed as follows: He had no form of majesty; he was undesirable, despised, rejected, suffering, acquainted with infirmity and held to be of no account. However, if these matters are considered antithetic, the following can be named as a description of elements of an ideal life: A long existence before the face of the Lord while people hold you in high esteem (Is 53:2, 3); to have health and to be reckoned with (Is 53:4, 5), to lead a life in such a way that God's ordinances are kept and thus no punishment takes place, to walk in the way designated by God's word (Is 53:6).

When all these aspects are present it will be reminiscent of a desirable life in the presence of God with secure continuity for the individual.

Even though the servant of Yahweh did not experience this amount of continuity, Ezekiel 37:1–14 provides a further view on life:

☐ Ezekiel 37

The vision of dry bones coming to life from death is well-known and much discussed. What is of interest to us is the interpretation of the vision in verses 11–14 in which the theological significance is found. The fundamental truth expressed in the first part of the vision is that there is no possibility of life for a heap of dry bones. This is the desperate situation the exiled Judah perceived themselves to be in: There is no hope for them. They were cut off from any meaning to live and from life itself. There is though, another fundamental truth that they did not consider and that is the sovereign Lord's power over life and death (Bowen 2010:229).

Quite often the point of discussion of this vision revolves around who the subjects of resurrection are, and about the genre. What is central to the vision though, is that life comes from the Lord. The way he brings the bones back to life is by means of his word spoken by his prophet, which is followed by putting his own Spirit into the Israelites as their breath of life. The new life they will be raised to live is therefore an extension of the life of God (Jenson 2009:284).

Zimmerli (1983:265) further indicates that life is proclaimed unconditionally to such an extent that no mention is made of any human causality to life. God's promise of life to humanity however, demands a return to him (Ezk 18:23). So all-inclusive is the origin and resurrection of life in the hands of God that Ezekiel has to pass the question about the possibility of new life back to God with the words: 'Lord, you know'. For God the new life given is not just a possibility, but an imminent action on his part.

In the same way as in the beginning when God initially created humanity, the recreation is done according to his initiative and his will. Just as he blew his רוּחַ [spirit] into the first human in order for him to become a living soul, so

he does it here. Block (2014:196) draws the attention to the fact that the Hebrews looked upon a human as a unity [נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה]. The divine sentence for sin is death, which means that the physical matter and the life-giving breath are divorced and the נֶפֶשׁ [spirit] is dissolved (cf. Job 34:14–15, Ps 104:29). In order for the physical matter to become a person, the infusion of the breath of life is necessary, and this is an activity solely performed by God.

A similarity exists between the sequence of activities performed in Genesis 2:7 and that in Ezekiel 37:7–10. In Genesis 2 the Lord God formed physical matter from dust and then infused the spirit of life into it. In Ezekiel 37:7–10 physical matter was first formed when the bones were provided with sinews, flesh and skin, but there was no breath (and thus life) in them (Ezk 37:8). Only when Yahweh acts as the causative agent will רוּחַ [breath] enter them and will they live [וְחָיִיתֶם]. The theological significance of these actions described in both Genesis 2 and Ezekiel 37 is that the Lord God does not only infuse life into dead matter during creation but again during recreation. Life is therefore, irrevocably bound to the person and ability of God. Life however, is not just given by God, but given with a purpose. The purpose given in Ezekiel 37 is: '[…] you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act […]'. Just as Yahweh spoke to the first humans in order to inform them of the purpose of their life, which is to represent him (Gn 1:27), he also states to Israel what the purpose of their new life will be after resurrection. They will be the recipients of the revelation of Yahweh about himself. The fact that Yahweh says that he will place them on their own land [אֲדָמָה] is also of theological importance because the land provided as a living space, was meant as a sphere where his people would proclaim him as the giver and maintainer of life. Because he had brought Israel back to life, not as an ethnical entity but as *people of God*, their purpose of life was reinstated, namely, to do what Israel had initially failed to accomplish which is to make Yahweh known for who he is (Helberg 1990:112).

◼ Spiritual life in representing God (Jr 11:21)

Within the context of Jeremiah 11:18–23, only one verse will be looked at, namely Jeremiah 11:21. In this verse, the Lord responds to the people of Anathoth wanting to silence the prophetic voice of Jeremiah.

The context of verse 21 is the individual lament made by the prophet because of the death threats against him in response to his prophecies against Judah and Jerusalem (Jr 11:18–20). This is followed by a divine response in verses 21–23. Lundbom (2013:89) provides the following structure for the lament: Jeremiah addresses a confidant in verse 18–19a; in 19bc the plot against Jeremiah by his enemies is quoted and this is followed in verse 20 by Jeremiah addressing Yahweh. In his address to Yahweh he calls for righteous judgement. To this call of Jeremiah, Yahweh responds in Jeremiah 21–23.

What is illuminating are the words of the people of Anathoth when compared with the righteous judgement of Yahweh. In verse 19, the threat against him is stated, namely a call for him to be cut off from the land of the living (previously discussed). The words being quoted are: 'וְנִכְרְתֶנּוּ מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים'. When the Lord delivers his judgement though, he uses the following words: 'הַמְבַקְשִׁים אֶת־נַפְשֶׁךָ' (translated in NRSV as 'who seek your life'). It is noticeable that different phrases are used. Although it may be argued that the two phrases are synonymous, it can also shed a certain amount of light on what 'life' means.

When נֶפֶשׁ is used, it can have the following possible meanings according to Swanson (1997a:5883): A living thing in creation; the inner self which is the essence of life including thinking, feeling, willing, desiring or the animate part of a person existing until death. To these possibilities Fredericks (1997:132) adds: It can mean the literal breath of animals and humans because breath is tantamount to life itself (like נְשָׁמָה). It can also stand for the inner person, representing the desires and inclinations of humans. Botterweck and Ringgren confirm these thoughts in an extensive discussion. If the possible meanings of נֶפֶשׁ are taken into account in the context of Jeremiah's lament and the answer of Yahweh, it can be understood in the following manner: Jeremiah bewails the threat against his life [חַיִּים] to which Yahweh answers that they are seeking his נֶפֶשׁ. God's words are therefore not a repetition of what the people of Anathoth said, but his interpretation of what the enemies wanted to do to Jeremiah. They wanted to cut him off from the land of the living but God's response is they want to take his נֶפֶשׁ. If נֶפֶשׁ and נְשָׁמָה are understood as describing the same semantic domain, it points in the direction that the judgement of Yahweh is that the enemies of Jeremiah want to take away the desire of Jeremiah to act according to the will of God. It is therefore, not just a matter of silencing the prophet by taking away his ability to speak against them. Much more is at stake as revealed by Yahweh.

What is actually threatened is not just the physical existence of Jeremiah, but his spiritual relationship with Yahweh. It is in a close relationship with God, which can only be a spiritual relationship, that true life exists. This is the case because God does not only provide physical life but also the task to represent him. Life can therefore only be considered as fulfilled when the giver of life is represented. That is what the inhabitants of Anathoth threatened with their plot to silence Jeremiah. They not only wanted to kill him but also cut off his spiritual relationship with God whom he represented. It is because of this threat that Yahweh announces his judgement of death over Anathoth. Brueggemann (1998a:116) comments in this regard that the people of Anathoth are guilty of trying to silence a prophet permanently. This is a scandalous offence in Israel, for prophets are constitutive of a communal life. The silence of a prophet therefore, diminishes the identity of Israel as a whole.

It can therefore be concluded that spiritual life is the innermost part of a person responding to God in such a way that he is represented in accordance with who he is.

◼ Life in exchange (Is 43:3–4)

The phrase תַחְתֶּיךָ וּלְאֻמִּים תַּחַת נַפְשֶׁךָ [nations in exchange for your life] appears only in Isaiah 43:3–4 in the Old Testament. It is also the only instance in the Old Testament where people are given in exchange for other people.

The background to these verses is Isaiah 42:21–25 where the exile of Judah is summarised. Although Yahweh taught his people to serve him, they never truly did. This called for his righteousness to bring the curses of the covenant over them to such an extent that the history of Israel apparently came to an end (Is 42:24,25). Despite the fury of war around the people of Yahweh, they still did not take the requirements of the relationship with him to heart. Therefore, the expectation is that there will be no further history for Israel because it seemed like a dead end. But Isaiah 43:1–7 then commences in a surprising way, with וְעַתָּה [but now] which introduces a new beginning. In this new beginning, the centre of Isaiah's preaching to the exiles is encapsulated. From the proclamation to the exiles it is clear that a decisive change in their plight has taken place. 'But now' creates the contrast between life in exile and the return to Yahweh. Although it seems as if the end of the road, as set forth in Isaiah 42:18–25, has been reached, Yahweh is never at the end of his reserves. It is in the most desperate circumstances that God intervenes in grace because he will not abandon the work of his hands. Because God is Israel's redeemer, he cannot release himself from his obligation to his people. His honour is at stake, and therefore he cannot allow it to be said that he has forsaken his people (cf. Is 48:9) (Van der Walt 2009:120).

Blenkinsopp (2008:221) draws attention to the notion of 'giving in exchange' which refers to the customary law of the גֹּאֵל [kinsman–redeemer] described in Leviticus 25:25. It was the obligation of the kinsman–redeemer to buy back the freedom of a family member in indentured service.

The fact that Yahweh is specified as 'Redeemer' (Is 43:1, 14) confirms the notion of him 'giving in exchange'. The idea is not that Yahweh owes anybody anything and therefore has to pay a debt, but conveys the estimated value of his people. He gives [נָתַתִּי] Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for Israel's life. As Childs (2001:334) puts it: 'The theological thought expressed turns on the high cost required for Israel's deliverance and the value of Israel in God's sight'. In the place of Israel, he puts three other nations. Not just Egypt as of old but also Kush and Seba (Brueggemann 1998c:53).

The reason why Israel's God is willing to give so much in exchange for the life of his people is given in a threefold description namely: They are precious, honoured and loved.

The reason why they were precious to him stretches back to Exodus 19:5 where Yahweh's election and founding of Israel is described. Out of all the nations he chose Israel to be his people, not because of something they contributed but because of his own initiative. From what were once not a people, he formed them for himself (Is 43:20). That initiative is still at work here and therefore he makes a new beginning for Israel.

Because they were founded as a people by Yahweh they are also of significance to him and therefore honoured [נִכְבַּדְתָּ] by him. They were thus of great importance to him because it is through them that he revealed himself to other nations (Stenmans 1977:19).

The last of the reasons Yahweh provides for His redeeming action is that he loves them [אֲהַבְתִּי]. When the root אָהַב [love] is used here, it refers to the very close personal relationship between Yahweh and his people. In this context, 'love' describes the irresistible force in the nature of Yahweh which is not guided by emotion, but by his character. In essence, God is holy and therefore acts in a totally different way as can be expected from humans. It is for this reason that Yahweh not only elected Israel, but also made them of importance. He acted in holiness towards them to their absolute advantage (Els 1998:280).

God's attitude towards the life of Israel is thus portrayed firstly by his initiative to institute them as a nation, but also to act on their behalf in such a way that they will remain a nation through whom his character can be revealed.

■ Theological contribution

The primary task given to Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel by Yahweh was to provide his perspective on the historical and spiritual setting of Israel and Judah in their pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic circumstances.

The first perspective proclaimed to them was that Yahweh was completely different from the gods of the other nations in the sense that he was, and still is, capable of acting decisively under all circumstances and in all geographic locations.

As the living God he is capable of infusing life into dead matter in such a way that he can be acknowledged as the one who brought about life. The way in which he infuses life is by imparting his own breath of life into the physical matter of his choice, in our case, humans. This brings about a relationship with God which provides continuity of existence. In order to have sustained existence, Yahweh provides a living space as well. In this space, he provides to such an extent that he is revealed as the origin of life.

Mere existence is in reality not the goal of life, and therefore Yahweh entered into a covenant with his people. The covenant would provide the parameters

for the experience of reality in God's presence. If these parameters or set of standards were adhered to, it would lead to fullness of life which is defined by all the gifts given by God to his people. If the standards were not maintained, it would mean that God's fidelity would be revealed paradoxically in the utmost measures namely discipline, exile and death. The frequent occurrence of the notion of life in the Major Prophets can therefore be ascribed to the prophets warning against the loss of their living sphere as well as life.

As the living and holy God, he is however not confined to one sphere of living because he is transcendent and therefore he reaches beyond the boundary of death, not merely physical death but even the spiritual death of a broken relationship with him. From there he brought his people back into the realm where he can be acknowledged and proclaimed for who he is. The first prophet to proclaim resurrection from the dead was Isaiah.

The new life received through resurrection should be spent in trusting God alone for continuity in existence. In this continuous state, the resurrected can have a complete experience of the gifts of God given in love. These gifts include matters such as: being reckoned or valued because of the relationship with God, joy in adhering to his standard and representing him. This would lead to the acknowledgement of him for who he is. When God is acknowledged, it leads to praise.

Life is therefore, not mere physical existence. According to the Major Prophets, life entails the experience of the relationship with God with such an amount of awareness of who he actually is, that praise will follow. Continuity in this relational state can therefore be called true life.

■ Conclusion

Under current circumstances, prolonging life receives a significant amount of scientific effort. The question of what life means, however, does not receive the same amount of attention. The perspective received from the Major Prophets draws attention to the notion that life concerns more than physical existence and especially spiritual existence in relation to God. The perspective given by these prophets during difficult circumstances of exile draws the attention away from the physical to the spiritual sphere.

With this in mind, a new emphasis must be placed on the prophetic view that life in the Old Testament does not merely mean 'to be alive', but that being 'alive' implies a complete and fulfilled life. To keep death away for as long as possible does not necessarily enhance the quality of life. What enhances the quality of life is to seek the essence of life found in close relation to God for whom death is not a boundary beyond which he cannot operate. Therefore, life can be seen as existing close to God under all circumstances and in all spheres.

Human responsibility in this situation is to exhibit the communicable attribute of life we received from God. This we need to do to such an extent that the living sphere which he provides to us is used to enjoy the continuity of the joy, dignity, freedom and security of God's presence, not only in a personal sense, but also as a community related to God.

Life in the Minor Prophets: Hosea – Malachi

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■ Introduction

The question on what life entails remains one of the most intriguing questions for human beings. A quick and superficial survey of the internet reveals a never-ending number of websites with quotes and anecdotes from all times, famous and infamous people on the enigma of the concept we call life. Marcus Aurelius said: 'Our life is what our thoughts make it'. Socrates once said: 'Not life, but good life, is to be chiefly valued'. Augustine said on the topic of life: 'If we live good lives, the times are also good. As we are, such are the times'. Martin Luther King Jr said: 'Life's most persistent question is: "What are you doing for others"'? More recently Elon Musk said: 'Life is too short for long-term grudges' (BrainyQuote s.a.).

To focus on the concept of life in both the Old Testament and New Testament is an important endeavour for at least two reasons. There is a renewed interest in life and particularly in living a meaningful life in current times. Lemmelijn (2018:287; cf. Lemmelijn 2017:12–24) notes how 'our times are very remarkably searching for things that "do really matter," for

"happiness," "meaning" and "wisdom"'. What people are looking for is a better quality of life (Lemmelijn 2018:287). Biblical scholars can (even must) respond to this trend in society in a fruitful and meaningful way by exploring the theme of life in the Bible. Secondly, there is a lack of a comprehensive and recent reflection on the concept of life in the Bible. As will become apparent in the rest of this contribution that even though the Old Testament may be characterised as 'A Book about Living' (Ausloos & Lemmelijn 2010:116), not much has been done to address the issue of life in the different corpora of the Old Testament in particular.

The problem or question addressed in this paper is to ask the question of how the concept of life is perceived in the Book of the Twelve. The research problem stated in this contribution may be formulated as follows: What does the concept of life mean in the Book of the Twelve? From a methodological point of view, the question is answered by first of all determining the occurrence of the Hebrew word most often used for 'life' [חי] in the Book of the Twelve. There are other words and concepts also closely related to the idea of life, especially the life of human beings. Concepts such as throat 'nephesh' [נפש], spirit [רוח] and blood [דם] are all related to the idea of life in the Old Testament but it is simply impossible to include these and other related terms in this investigation as well. It should also be kept in mind that even where there are no other words or concepts used related to the idea of life, the Old Testament at large and the corpus propheticum in particular address the very issue of life. Ausloos and Lemmelijn (2010) remark in this regard:

> The Old Testament offers guidance and encouragement in everyday life. Those who have to deal discouragement, misfortune and despair in their lives, meet, in the Old Testament, people who, in suffering and guilt, in joy and terror, in the thirst for knowledge and in skepticism, in industrious work and in the delights of sexual love, burdened by violence and aggression, still gear their lives to God. The Old Testament is familiar with the highs and lows of human existence. (p. 118)

To restrict this investigation to the occurrence of חי [life] will help to keep the research within controllable limits. Secondly, the relevant texts will be investigated by means of a careful reading of the verses taking the literary and historical contexts of the texts into account. Thirdly, a theological understanding of the concept of life will be constructed based upon the results of a careful reading of the relevant texts.

■ Listing the relevant texts

The following texts were identified containing the concept of life [חי]: Hosea 2:1 (1:10 Eng); 2:14; 2:20; 4:3; 4:15; 6:2; 13:8; 14:8; Amos 5:4, 6, 14; 8:14; Jonah 2:7; 4:3; 4:8; Habakkuk 2:4; 3:2; Zephaniah 2:9; 2:14 (2:15 Eng); 2:16; Zechariah 1:5; 10:9; 13:3; 14:8; Malachi 2:5.

■ The historical time of the relevant texts: A brief overview

Space does not allow to provide the reader with a comprehensive historical context of each of the relevant verses in the different prophetic books. What is interesting is that the concept of life is mentioned from the earliest writing prophet till the book of Jonah that is considered as one of the latest books in the corpus propheticum covering a period of roughly 400 years. It seems that the concept of life functions as a continuous theme in the Book of the Twelve. Amos is considered to be the first of the so-called writing prophets. According to Amos 1:1, Amos delivered his prophecies during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel (*c.* 786 BC–746 BC). It was a time when there was little threat from other powerful nations and hence it was a period of relative peace and prosperity for the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The prophecies of Amos are normally dated around 750 BC. According to the very first verse in the book of Hosea the prophecies uttered in the book can be dated to the second half of the 8th century BC making him a contemporary of Amos. With little pressure from foreign military powers, it was a time of prosperity for the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

In the case of the book of Habakkuk because of the mentioning of the Chaldeans in Habakkuk 1:6, a probable date for the book may be determined after 605 BC (as the start of Babylonian dominance) and 597 BC (as the date of the first deportation of Judeans in Babylonian exile). It is clear that the setting of the book is indeed the years after the Babylonians came to power but before the deportation of Judeans in exile to Babylonia. In Habakkuk 2:20 the temple is mentioned as the earthly dwelling of YHWH with no hint that the temple may be or was destroyed by the Babylonian forces (Snyman 2020:46–48).

According to Zephaniah 1:1, the prophecies of these prophets were uttered during the time of king Josiah of Judah somewhere between 640 BC and 609 BC. It was a time when the Assyrian Empire was in its downfall while the Babylonians were on the rise as the next super power of the world during that time (Snyman 2020:93–95).

Dating the book of Zechariah is a controversial matter as the book can be divided into three distinct parts (Zch 1–8; 9–11; 12–14). Recent scholarship tends to date the last two parts of the book relatively close to the dates found in the first part of the book (Rose 2012:184). The book can therefore be dated as sometime during the 6th century BC.

The book of Malachi can be dated during the years 460 BC–450 BC. This means that Malachi was a prophet during the Persian empire and specifically during the reign of Artaxerxes I (464 BC–424 BC).

The book of Jonah is considered to be one of the latest books in corpus propheticum. It is certainly a post-exilic book and the mentioning of the book by Jesus Sirach (Jnh 49:10) is an indication of a date prior to the beginning of the 2nd century BC.

■ Towards a theological understanding of the concept of life

■ God as the living God

In only two books in the Book of the Twelve (Hos 2:1 [Eng 1:10]; 4:15; Zeph 2:9) God is presented as the living God.

In Hosea 2:1 (Eng 1:10) it is said that the Israelites will be called 'sons of the living God' – an expression Wolff (1974:27) sees 'as Hosea's own creation'. For Israel to be called sons of the living God is an interesting statement as it came after a devastating prophecy where the relationship between YHWH and his people is compared to a marriage where the husband is portrayed as being married to an 'adulterous wife' (Hos 1:2). The covenantal relationship between YHWH and his people has come to an unfortunate end according to the symbolic names of the last two sons born from this marriage. There will be no more compassion [לא רחמה] and the people of YHWH will no longer be the people of YHWH [לא עמי]. Then, quite unexpectedly, it is foreseen that the covenant will be restored so that instead of being called 'Lo-Ammi' 'not my people' [לא עמי] they will be called 'sons of the living God' [בני אל חי]. One may therefore agree with Preuss (1991:279) when he said that the notion of God as a living God denotes a relationship with him. In a similar vein, Wolff (1974:27) remarked that this expression presents 'a contrasting metaphor to the "children of whoredom" who owe their existence to a foreign god'. For Smith (1994 [Logos edn.]) this designation means that the people regained their status and are acknowledged by God as his own, that God as the living God will give victory, in contrast to dead idols and thirdly, God as the God of life is able to give life. This life-giving power of the living God will result in an abundance of population reminding one of the promises made to Abraham that his offsprings will be as numerous as the dust of the earth and sand on the seashore (Gn 13:16; 22:17; 32:12). God as the living God stands in stark contrast to the Canaanite gods of fertility who die and rise again year after year (Van Leeuwen 1968:46–47). People called sons or children of the living God cannot worship dying or dead gods. This contrast between worshipping the living God and the gods of Canaan is repeated in Hosea 4:15. One cannot go to places of worship like Gilgal and Beth Aven and at the same time take an oath in the name of the living God, YHWH. When YHWH's name was called in these sanctuaries it was done in deceit because in fact, Baal was worshipped there (Wolff 1974:90). Hosea then warns the people not to follow the foreign practices in places like Gilgal or Beth Aven as these practices are influenced

by Canaanite religion. In Amos 8:14 gods of foreign people are ridiculed as being alive while they are in actual fact no-gods incapable of doing anything and destined to fall, never to rise again.

Zephaniah 2:9 contains the second statement on God as the living God in the Book of the Twelve. The statement occurs in the context of a prophecy of doom pronounced upon Moab and Ammon. The Moabites and the Ammonites are accused of insulting the people of God and making threats against their land (Zeph 2:8). To taunt and insult the people of God in this way 'was tantamount to making fun of YHWH himself' (Roberts 1991:200) and consequently YHWH reacts to these insults. He does so by making use of a formula introducing an oath: 'Therefore, as sure as I live says the Lord Almighty'. As there is no higher authority to take an oath by, YHWH took an oath by his own life (Van der Woude 1978:119). It is also interesting to note that nowhere in the Old Testament does one take an oath by one's own life. It is only YHWH who takes an oath by his own name. YHWH is the living God ready to act on behalf of his people.

In this case Moab and Ammon are likened to the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah that were utterly destroyed (Gn 19:24–25). To compare Moab and Ammon to what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah is not by coincidence. They were the descendants of the daughters of Lot who got impregnated by their father and so Moab and Ammon were born and became the ancestors of the Moabites and the Ammonites. The simile makes it clear that the same fate that once befell Sodom and Gomorrah awaits Moab and Ammon (Snyman 2020:123). This oath formula where YHWH swears upon his own life is also found elsewhere in the former prophets (1 Sm 14:39; 45; 19:6) and the latter prophets (Is 49:18; Jer 22:24; 46:18). By swearing upon YHWH's own life, there can be no question about the outcome of this prophecy of doom. In the prayer of Habakkuk in Habakkuk 3, the petition to YHWH is that the deeds of YHWH must come to life (Hab 3:2). That the deeds of YHWH may come to life can happen because he is the living God.

That God is presented as the living God is significant as it is not stated explicitly in the classic formulations of who God is in the Old Testament. That God is the living God is not mentioned in Exodus 34:6–7 neither is it mentioned in Deuteronomy 26:5–9 which according to Von Rad served as Israel's credo of who YHWH is and what he did. The reason for the absence of statements on YHWH as the living God is probably because of the fact that it was something that was assumed and never really contested. It is only a living God who can create the heaven and the earth, make promises to the ancestors, redeem his people from the bondage of Egypt, enter into a covenant with his people, grant them the land. It is only a living God who is 'compassionate and gracious, slow to anger abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin' (Ex 34:6–7).

Ausloos and Lemmelijn (2010:116–117) stated that the idea that God is a living God who reveals himself in the lives of those who acknowledge him and keep his commandments is the basic axiom of the Old Testament. It is then odd that when books on the theology of the Old Testament are consulted, the idea of God as the living God does not get the attention one would have expected. Preuss (1991:279–280) wrote a paragraph on God as a living God. According to Preuss (1991:279) the idea of God as a living God has more to do with his works than with his being and it emphasises God's power and might. Waltke (2007:228–230; 908–910) devoted some pages to the concept of life but restricted his discussion to the Genesis account of the tree of life and life as particularly seen in the wisdom literature. More recently, Fischer (2012) devoted a few pages to this topic. He relates God as the living God to God as creator who has the ability to grant life (Fischer 2012:254–255). Fischer (2012:270) states: '"*Leben" kennzeichnet den biblischen Gott'*. God is addressed as the living God, he gives life and he himself is filled with life. That God is the living God also means that God may display emotions such as love, hate, passion, anger, wrath and compassion (Fischer 2012:270).

■ Life in nature

Wild animals are seen as living creatures living on earth as part of nature (Hos 2:14; 2:20; 4:3; 13:8; Zeph 2:14–15). Plants are not seen as living creatures.

Hosea 2:14 [Eng 2:12] is part of a prophecy of doom upon the people of God. Vines and fig trees were seen as pay from her lovers, the Baal-gods. They will however not enjoy the fruit; instead, the wild animals (חית השדה [the living of the field]) will devour Israel's vines and fig trees. The living wild animals will be instrumental in implementing YHWH's judgement upon his people. Nature in the form of living wild animals is in the service of YHWH. The same idea is found in Hosea 13:8 where YHWH's judgement upon his people is described with imagery taken from the predators devouring their prey.

In Hosea 2:20 [Eng 2:18] the role of nature is turned around. Instead of the living animals of field acting as YHWH's agent in executing his judgement upon his people, a covenant will now be formed with the living beasts of the field together with the birds and the creatures that move along the ground. It seems that YHWH acts as a kind of covenant mediator between Israel and 'the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground'. The living wild animals that were instrumental in YHWH's execution of his judgement upon his people, will now live in peace with the people. A paradisiacal harmony between man and animals is established (Rudolph 1966:80; Wolff 1974:51). The intended renewal of the relationship with his people is now extended to a cosmic renewal and peace (Hiuser & Barton 2014:344). The life of the wild animals is regarded as worthy enough for YHWH to enter into a covenant with them in order to care for and protect

them from humans. Wild animals on the other hand, were a real threat to people vulnerable to attacks from wild animals but this will change as a result of the covenant with the animals. This of course can only happen when the relationship with YHWH has been restored through the proper worship of YHWH alone abandoning the worship of Baal (Hos 2:18–19 [Eng 2:16–17]). Peace with nature will also be extended to peace with other nations (Hos 2:20 [Eng 2:18]). Needless to say, peace with other nations enhances the quality of life.

In Hosea 4:3 yet another picture of the living wild animals together with other creatures is portrayed. The land together with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and fish of the sea are dying as a result of the sins of the people. Instead of faithfulness, love and acknowledgement of YHWH there is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery and bloodshed follows bloodshed (Hos 4:1–2). The land is personified to 'mourn' as a result of the sins of the people. This kind of human conduct does have an effect on creation at large. The land will wither away so much so that it will not be possible to support life. This close connection between what people do and its consequences on the land reflects a 'synthetic view of life' (Wolff 1974:68). That the way humans live does have a negative impact on the environment is a quite remarkable insight. Hosea presents us with a multi-facetted view on life: Life in nature is seen as instrumental in executing YHWH's judgement but at the same time it is also foreseen that humans and animals will live in harmony. Yet, nature suffers because of the way in which humans behave.

Zephaniah 2:14–15 is part of a prophecy of doom upon Assyria. A city and country once vibrant with people will be laid to waste with wild and domestic animals that will roam where people once lived (Snyman 2020:124–125). A once majestic city will be ruined and inhabited by flocks and wild animals making their homes in its once elegant buildings (Roberts 1991:202). Living beasts will take the place of living human beings. A living, thriving civilisation will be abandoned to a living nature. Nature and in particular wild animals are presented as a living entity in the service of YHWH as the creator of heaven and earth.

In a vision portraying the coming day of YHWH in the last chapter of the book of Zechariah, it is foreseen that 'living water' will flow out from Jerusalem (Zch 14:8). Living water simply refers to fresh water coming from a well flowing from Jerusalem over against still standing water in a pool or dam. In the time to come, water flowing from Jerusalem will eventually reach the Dead Sea to the east and the Mediterranean Sea to the west (Rudolph 1976:235–236). Water is necessary for humans as well as for animals and vegetation so that the image of living water flowing is indicative of the abundant fertility that will follow as the result of the water flowing from Jerusalem (Van der Woude 1984:260). Fountains often dry up during the dry season in summer time and

therefore mentioning summer and winter is of particular significance. A constant supply of abundant water enough to cover the whole of the land is almost beyond imagination. In Hosea 2:20 a covenant with nature is foreseen so that nature will be no threat to human beings. The same thought is continued in Zechariah 14 where an abundant supply of life-giving water will be to the benefit of people.

Nature comprises living beings created by God and in the service of the God who created it. Because nature is seen as created by God, there is no trace of a possible deification of nature.

■ Human beings as living persons

In some texts it is simply stated that to be a human being means to be a living person in the physical sense of the word (Jnh 4:3, 8; Zch 1:5; 10:9; 13:3). In Jonah 4:3 Jonah said to YHWH that YHWH may take his life, for it is better for him to die than to live. In Jonah 4:8 Jonah repeated this wish. In Zechariah 1:5 it is said that the prophets do not live forever. Central to be human is to be alive.

Life is seen as a gift from God (Jonah 2:6; Hs 6:2). In Hosea 6:2 the people acknowledge that it is only YHWH that can grant them life. Life means to live in the presence of YHWH. To stray away from YHWH by worshipping other gods leads to death. To return to YHWH opens the possibility of a restored relationship with God and consequently the possibility of new life. It is only YHWH who by his grace can grant his people another chance of new life.

Jonah 2 consists of Jonah's prayer to YHWH from the belly of the great fish that swallowed him. In this prayer he voiced his experience as an experience of being in Sheol – death itself. It is a known motif in the ancient Near East that a journey of three days and three nights was needed to complete a journey to the underworld and back (Allen 1976:213; Baldwin 1993:566). While still in the belly of the fish he made this remarkable statement that YHWH brought him from the pit to life (Jon 2:7 [Eng 2:6]). In the depth of the underworld where there was no hope left, Jonah was rescued from death and brought to life again (Smith 1995:n.p. [Logos edn.]; Van der Woude 1985:33). The last verse of the chapter stated that YHWH commanded the fish and vomited Jonah on to dry land. God granted Jonah new life even in spite of the fact that Jonah deserved to perish for his disobedience to the call of YHWH. Jonah confessed YHWH as the God who rescued him from death and brought him to life again. YHWH is the God who grants people life and therefore life should be treasured as a gift from God.

To be human mean to be alive. Life is a seen as a gift from God. Life is also limited. Neither the prophets nor any other person will live forever. Life is also

seen as a second chance after a major catastrophe like an experience of death (like Jonah) or a return from exile to the land again. A restored relationship with God is also seen as a new beginning – a second life. In fact, life is only meaningful when it is lived in a relationship with God.

■ Life as a metaphor

In some parts of the Book of the Twelve the concept of life takes on a metaphorical meaning. Life is more than just being alive in the physical sense of the word.

☐ In Amos life is presented as living a life of righteousness and justice (Amos 5:4; 5:6; 5:14)

‘Seek me and live’ (Am 5:4).
‘Seek the Lord and live’ (Am 5:6).
‘Seek good, not evil, that you may live’ (Am 5:14).

Amos 5 consists of two parts (Am 5:1–17; 18–27) and is perhaps one of the most well-known chapters in this prophetic book. The form of the first part of the chapter can be described as a lament expected at a funeral (Wolff 1977:232). The message is clear that Israel, the people of God, passed away and the only meaningful thing to do now is to lament her death at her funeral. In a grim irony the hearers are addressed as the corpses over whom a lamentation is raised (Wolff 1977:236). A prophecy of doom is couched in the literary genre of a funeral lament.

Verse 4 came as an utter surprise. After all the prophecies of doom and judgement in the preceding chapters of the book, there is all of a sudden, a glimmer of hope (Kessler 2016:8). Instead of a certain death there is the possibility of life. A stark contrast between certain death and the possibility of life is drawn. The possibility of life stands in contradiction to what preceded and follows this verse. What makes this sudden possibility even more remarkable is the fact that it is YHWH himself who is speaking. It is YHWH who invites his ‘fallen virgin, Israel’ (Am 5:2) to seek him and live. To seek YHWH implies that the people lost sight of YHWH. That is evident from the trespasses the prophet highlights in the rest of the passage. To seek YHWH has different meanings. To seek YHWH may mean to consult a prophet (Smith & Page 1995 [Logos edn.]; Van Leeuwen 1985:183; Wolff 1977:238). It may also mean to pay a visit to the sanctuary or temple of YHWH or in a more general sense to serve YHWH according to the stipulations of the Torah. To seek YHWH may then also mean obedience to the word and commandments of God. To seek YHWH means to live in a relationship with God through obedience to his will as revealed in the Torah and mediated through a prophet. To seek YHWH is to live as both verbs used are imperatives.

In Amos 5:6 the same invitation is repeated but this time it is the prophet and not YHWH who urges the people to seek YHWH and then to become alive again. The alternative to this possibility is also stated: utter destruction awaits the house of Joseph. To live has thus the double meaning of avoiding certain death on the one hand but also to live life in a righteous way according to the guidelines revealed in the word of YHWH and mediated through the prophets. The opposite of a righteous way of living is made clear in this chapter: to have a disregard for truth (v. 10), to trample the poor (v. 11), to oppress the righteous (v. 12), to take bribes (v. 12), to deprive the poor from justice in the courts (v. 12) are examples of the many offences the people committed and how great their sins are (v. 12).

Amos 5:14 may be seen as an interpretation of Amos 5:4. To seek what is good equals to what it means to seek YHWH and to not seek evil equals not to go to Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba. Good can be described as that which is meaningful, that what serves a good purpose, is useful, something that is to the benefit of others and the society at large (Kessler 2016:9). When the people do good again they will find that YHWH is with them again. Life means to live in the presence of God. In the context of the rest of the chapter to do good is the ability to make the right decisions and then act in a just way. Righteousness is a way of life. To seek good is to discern what is good in the realm of human relationships. Righteousness will not be found at the sanctuaries as they are doomed to destruction. To live a life of righteousness is to attain what is good and not evil. To seek what is good is life. Righteousness has to be seen and experienced in the realm of every day relationships between human beings (Kessler 2016:12).

To avoid certain death, righteousness has to be restored. Righteousness is then a prerequisite for life. To seek YHWH is parallel to seeking the good and the good manifest in a righteous living (Kessler 2016:14). The theme of righteousness is continued in the next passage (Am 5:18–27). Cult practices are severely criticised as of no use to please YHWH. Instead, what is required is to 'let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream' (Am 5:27). The close connection between life and righteousness is important. The emphasis found in Amos especially and also in other prophetic books on righteousness as part and parcel of living life underlines the importance that life is more than surviving from day to day. Life means to live in a dignified way because of righteousness in society.

☐ In Habakkuk life is described as keeping the faith (Hab 2:4)

'[…] the righteous will live by his faith […]' (Hab 2:4).

It is widely accepted that the book of Habakkuk consists of a dialogue between the prophet and God (Clendenen 2014:506; Snyman 2020:53). The main

question addressed in this book is the issue of theodicy. Theodicy is a term used to explain the relation between God and evil. Theodicy derives from the Greek words for 'god' [theos] and 'justice' [dike] and aims at an explanation of why God, the loving, almighty and good God can allow evil in this world. In popular language it is seen as the question of why bad things happen to good people. Theodicy can also be seen as the question of why the righteous have to suffer. The real issue raised by the prophet is not the evil of violence and destruction but his observation that YHWH does not act upon this serious situation. The emphasis is not on the violence committed but rather on why YHWH is apparently absent and therefore ignorant of the plight of especially the righteous people living in the land. Andersen (2001) explains the issue of theodicy in the book of Habakkuk as follows:

> The way things are in this world does not match a God who is supposed to be good, strong, compassionate, wise, just […] The two realities of God and the world do not seem to fit. (p. 11)

In Habakkuk 2:2–4 YHWH gives his second reply to Habakkuk's complaint. YHWH commissioned his prophet to create a huge poster so that people may read his answer to Habakkuk's questions. The second reply is then given in Verse 4 and consists of two parts. Time and space do not allow to get into the details of this complicated verse. The verse starts with a description of those who are 'puffed up'. They are not upright. Those who are described as 'puffed up' may also be interpreted as 'the proud' (Bruce 1999:858; Robertson 1990:174) or 'swollen' (Haak 1992:57); or 'the presumptuous' (Dietrich 2016:109); or 'the fainthearted' (Roberts 1991:105). The people described here can be best understood as the Babylonians and also the ones Habakkuk complained about initially meaning the people within Judah who are responsible for the destruction, violence, strife and conflict resulting in the Torah being paralysed and justice perverted (Snyman 2020:70). The 'puffed up' or 'the presumptuous' are not upright (meaning to be straight or level) and therefore they will not prevail. In spite of all the power they now have crushing other people, eventually they will perish. To be 'puffed up' or arrogant is then a summary of all that has been said about the behaviour of the upcoming threat of the Babylonians. In the first part, Habakkuk (and his audience) is reassured that violence and injustices committed in society will be dealt with.

In the second part of the answer Habakkuk has to tell his people to keep faith and trust YHWH. To keep faith means to keep on believing in the God of justice even where there is little evidence of his justice to be seen. To keep faith means to continue to do what is right simply because it is right to do so even with no promise of any reward (Bratcher 1984:322). According to Nogalski (2011:667–668) the prophet is convinced that the answer to the problem of injustice is essentially to wait and trust that YHWH knows best.

It is a strange answer given to Habakkuk. The vision does in no way explain or justify God's actions through the upcoming Babylonian forces. The vision does not provide the prophet nor the listeners or the readers of the prophecy any insight into God's way of directing world affairs. God neither defends his actions to the prophet. Neither Habakkuk nor the people will have the ability to grasp the ways in which God governs world affairs. It is therefore of no use to reveal it to them. The 'why' questions of Habakkuk are not answered in a simple and direct way. Instead, the people of Judah are encouraged to remain faithful to YHWH by putting their trust in him. It is by putting their trust in him that they will live and eventually overcome the current hardship they have to endure. In Habakkuk, the people are encouraged to live by faith and to live by faith means to live the life of a righteous person by doing what is right. The Hebrew word 'enuma' [אמונה] can therefore not only be rendered as faith. The Hebrew word also has the connotation of being faithful or trustworthy, reliable, even depicting integrity. It seems best to allow for (perhaps an intended) ambiguity in the text rather than an either/or meaning of 'enuma' [אמונה]. So, life in the book of Habakkuk means to keep the faith in YHWH and to remain faithful to YHWH. Life means to live life steadfast and faithful, trusting God in extremely trying times. The righteous will overcome the current period because they have kept the faith by remaining faithful to God. They will live because of the tenacity of their faithfulness to God. To keep faith in YHWH and living a faithful life result in a righteous life. The faithful ones are those who live by faith and who will survive the hardships of the current time. Habakkuk 2:4 is therefore an encouragement to live life both faithfully and in faithfulness.

Biblical faith holds on tenaciously to both the reality of the justice of God and the injustice of the world. The world is real and the God who created it is also real. This is what Habakkuk believes and he manages somehow to survive by faith (Andersen 2001:11).

☐ In Malachi life is seen as living in a (priestly) covenantal relationship (Ml 2:5–7)

'My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace' (Ml 2:5).

Malachi 2:5–7 is part of a lengthy prophecy stretching from Malachi 1:6–2:9. Malachi 2:5–7 is then part of the second part (Ml 2:1–9) of the prophecy where the priests are directly addressed. According to this passage, YHWH entered into a covenant with Levi. What exactly this covenant with Levi means is not clear. According to Numbers 25:10–13 YHWH made a covenant with the grandson of Aaron, Phineas. This covenant means that Phineas and his descendants will enjoy 'a covenant of a lasting priesthood, a covenant of peace' (Nm 25:13). It might be that this covenant may only be an expression

of a special relationship between YHWH and the Levites and not a formal treaty as was the case with the covenant at Sinai. This covenant with the Levites in the Malachi text is described as one consisting of life and peace for the priesthood. According to Deuteronomy 30:16, 19 life is equated with blessings while death is associated with curses. Life then means happiness because of the covenantal blessings. Life may also mean power and strength, the fulfilment of what is expected and hoped for. Life also means the physical existence in the land, health and fellowship with God. A long life was a sure token of the blessings by YHWH and together with it the promise of a lasting priesthood (Snyman 2015:87). Life (and peace) also meant that the priests will live in a revered relationship with YHWH walking with God as Henoch and Noah once did (Gn 5:24; 6:9). Life also has the meaning of having knowledge of the Torah and teaching the people the Torah. Knowledge of the Torah combined with teaching the people the Torah will result in them turning away from injustices. When all of this will happen, it will amount to a life of peace (Scheffler 2018:201). It is significant that life and peace are grouped together (the only instance in the Old Testament where it happens). Life and peace belong together. Peace is a concept understood as 'wholeness' and 'wellbeing' in an encompassing way (Meinhold 2006:151-152; Kessler 2011:170; Noetzel 2015:126). Peace also has the connotation of 'care' and 'protection' (Stuart 1998:1317). People who are taken care of and who are protected by YHWH will have an experience of peace. To be at peace means to have lived life to the fullest.

The idea of life has a special meaning in Malachi 2:5. It describes the priestly life of the Levites as living in a special covenantal relationship with YHWH in a way that makes life equal to a life of peace.

■ Conclusion

This investigation revealed an almost bewildering variety of perspectives on the concept of life in the Book of the Twelve. God as the living God served as an important theological starting point for this investigation. Ausloos and Lemmelijn (2010) are correct when they made the statement that:

> [*T*]he idea that God is a living God who reveals himself in the lives of those who acknowledge him and keep his commandments is the basic axiom of the Old Testament. (pp. 116–117)

This investigation confirms the conclusion Gerleman (1971:554) came to when he stated that the idea of YHWH as the living God is not emphasised in the Old Testament. The statements on God as the living God occur in the contexts of the worshipping of other gods who are of course rendered lifeless by the prophets. Is there then a missionary aspect in the proclamation of God as the only living God? The idea of God as a living God also indicates

a relationship with God. Because he is the living God he is the one who grants life. Gerlemann's (1971:555) observation in this regard is that YHWH bestows life and that he ordained life. Life is a gift of the living God and human beings are created as living beings. There is a close connection between being alive as a human being and being created by God as a human being (Gerleman 1971:555–557).

To be human means to be a living being. Life in the physical sense of the word is part of the thinking of what life entails in the Book of the Twelve. This observation is, theologically speaking, an important one. This perspective of life in the physical sense of the word serves as a guard against an idea sometimes found in Christianity that life is actually all about the salvation of the soul to eternal life hereafter. Life is also seen as living in a (restored) relationship with the living God. Modern readers should be careful to make a distinction between life in the physical sense of the word and spiritual life. The investigation did not find any trace of such a distinction in Old Testament faith.

Life can only be lived in the realisation that God is the living God who grants life to human beings. Life is best lived in a relationship with God because he is the one who granted life and is therefore the source of life. When life is lived in a close relationship with God it amounts to a life of peace. Fischer (2004:111) opines in this regard '*Der Mensch is Geschöpf, welches sein Leben von Gott erhalten hat und sich nicht unabhängig von Gott verstehen kann*'. It is therefore best to live life keeping the faith in YHWH even in the harshest of circumstances. Life granted to humans is limited and therefore valuable.

Life is also closely connected to a relationship with fellow human beings. This aspect is particularly emphasised in the Book of Amos. The exhortation to seek YHWH means life and that life means to love the good and hate evil (Am 5:14–15) and that manifests in justice and righteousness in society (Kessler 2016:14).

Life is also extended to nature. Wild animals are regarded as the 'living ones of the field'. Wild animals are in the service of YHWH who may even be part of the execution of his judgement of humans. One of the surprising findings of this investigation is that what was said in Hosea 4:3 that nature suffers because of the way in which humans conduct themselves. Quite remarkable is mentioning the covenant between YHWH and the animals. The life of the wild animals is regarded as worthy enough for YHWH to enter into a covenant with them in order to care for and protect them from humans. Wild animals on the other hand, were a real threat to people vulnerable to attacks from wild animals but this will change as a result of the covenant with

the animals. In this regard one is reminded of Genesis 9:9–17 where in the aftermath of the Flood narrative, God initiated a covenant between him, Noah and his descendants (Gn 9):

> [A]nd with every living creature that was with you – the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you – every living creature on earth. (v. 10)

Being alive as a human being is theologically speaking important. It is therefore worthwhile to gain a theological insight on the issue of life.

Life in the Psalms

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■ Introduction

The verb חיה [to live] and related nominal forms occur frequently in Psalms. They occur more frequently only in Genesis and Ezekiel. Remarkably, of the 31 verbal forms in Psalms, 16 occur in Psalm 119 (where no nominal forms occur). The noun חַיִּים [life] also occurs frequently in Psalms, only second in number to Proverbs (for these statistics, cf. Gerleman 1997:412–413). Another word frequently used for 'life' is נֶפֶשׁ. It occurs 144 times in Psalms (cf. Westermann 1997:743–744). It has, however, a range of meanings and of these, only the meaning 'life', with its different connotations, is relevant for this paper. In this sense, נֶפֶשׁ is found more than 50 times in Psalms. In this contribution, the occurrence of the words meaning 'life' in Psalms is described in more detail. The description is followed by a discussion of the treatment in literature of these words in Psalms, especially in theological dictionaries of the Old Testament. The usages of these words in Psalms are discussed under a number of headings. This contribution is concluded by a discussion of the theological message of these words in Psalms.

■ The occurrences of the verb חיה and related nominal forms in Psalms

In different sources, such as the article by Gerleman (1997) and the concordances of Lissowsky (1958) and Mandelkern (1971), information about the occurrences of the different words varies because of different interpretations of certain forms and text-critical issues. Statistics (Table 8.1) are given for the verb חיה and related nominal forms based on my own interpretation of the different forms. The occurrences of the verb for each of the different books of Psalms are also listed to indicate their spread.

The table shows that half of the verbal forms occur in Psalm 119, while the noun חַיִּים occurs mainly in books 1 and 2. For the theological message of these words in Psalms, the verbal forms in Psalms 119 and the noun חַיִּים are of special importance.

■ The occurrences of the noun נֶפֶשׁ in Psalms

The noun נֶפֶשׁ occurs 754 times in the Old Testament, according to Westermann (1997:743). It is found 144 times in Psalms, more than in any other book. As discussed further, different meanings or senses of the noun can be distinguished. One of these can be linked to 'life'. Although the meaning of the word can be linked to more than one possibility, in his discussion of the meaning 'life', Westermann has just more than 50 examples. These are spread through the different books of the Psalter (Table 8.2).

Although the exact numbers can be adjusted, it is quite clear that the noun is spread fairly regularly between the different books.

■ Previous theological reflection

Rinngren (1980:332–342) does not discuss the use of the verb and related words according to the different sections of the Old Testament, but rather in

TABLE 8.1: Statistics for the verb חיה and related nominal forms, and the occurrences of the verb in each of the different books of Psalms.

Psalms	חיה Qal	חיה Piel	'Living' or 'alive' חַי	'Animals' חַיָּה	'Life' חַיָּה	'Life' חַיִּים	Total
Book 1	1	4	3			13	**21**
Book 2	2	1	4	2		9	**18**
Book 3	2	2	1	2	2		**9**
Book 4				3		2	**5**
Book 5	6	14	4	1	1	3	**29**
(Ps 119)	(5)	(11)					**(16)**
Total	**11**	**21**	**12**[†]	**8**	**3**	**27**	**82**

[†], The occurrence of the word חַי in Psalm 58:10 is quite problematic, as can be seen in the discussions of Tate (1998), Kraus (1993a) and DeClaissé-Walford et al. (2014). Because of the uncertainty, this example will not be used in this discussion. The same is true of בָּחַיִּים in Psalm 17:14.

TABLE 8.2: The spread of the word נֶפֶשׁ linked to 'life' through the different books of Psalms.

Book	Occurrences
Book 1	16
Book 2	15
Book 3	7
Book 4	3
Book 5	11
Total	**52**

the Old Testament as a whole. He distinguishes 11 different usages, with examples from a variety of passages in the Old Testament. Not all of these usages occur in Psalms. Those that do are listed as follows:

• The verb is used to denote a person's lifespan, as is the noun for life [חַיִּים], in expressions such as 'all the days of my life' (cf. Ps 23:6; 27:4) or 'during my life' (Ps 49:29: 63:5).
• Life and death are frequently juxtaposed as in Psalms 118:7 and 89:49.
• The verb can also denote a full, rich and happy life. The use of the Piel of the verb in Psalms is related to the meaning 'to preserve life, to keep alive' as in Psalms 33:19 and 143:11.
• He refers to life gained by keeping the commandments, also in Psalms, but with no examples from individual psalms.
• The king and life are also linked as in Psalms 21:5 and 61:7.
• Life is seen as a gift from God as in Psalm 36:10.
• God is seen as the living God as in Psalms 42:3 and 84:3.
• Life also occurs in expressions such as the 'tree of life', 'the book of life' (Ps 69:29) and 'the land of the living' (Ps 52:7).
• As opposed to life, humans are seen as mortal, as no one can live forever (Ps 49:9–10).

Gerleman (1997:411–412) departs from the uses of the verb, which in the Qal indicates 'to be/remain alive' as in Psalm 89:49. The Piel and Hiphil have the meaning 'to keep alive', 'to let live'. חַי means 'lively' and 'alive'. In these instances, Gerleman gives very few examples, and none from the psalms. The noun חַיִּים is a comprehensive word for 'life', and it can be used in temporal expressions (as indicated by Ringgren above). He also refers to God as the 'living' God, but does not add anything not discussed by Ringgren.

Brensinger (1997:110–11) is the only one of the three contributors to the theological dictionaries who treats the different parts of the Old Testament separately. He has a section dealing specifically with Psalms. He says the verb in Psalms occurs mostly in laments, where the life of the poet is in danger and he asks for his life to be preserved. The verb often occurs in songs of praise. The Lord is praised because he helps people to find the path of life (Ps 16:11), because he gives benefits and shows enduring grace.

He deals with Psalm 119 in some detail. Life is seen as the result of God's kindness and mercy. Understanding his decrees makes life possible. Renewal of life is also possible through God's word, promise, love and laws. He concludes that according to this psalm, the Lord gives life, sustains and renews life and gives it meaning.

As far as נֶפֶשׁ is concerned, Westermann (1997:744) distinguishes six usages, namely meanings referring to concrete things ('breath', 'gullet'); 'longing', 'desire' and 'craving' ('hunger', 'vengeance', 'desire', 'negative aspects'); 'soul'; 'life'; 'living being or person' and 'corpse'. Seebass (1998) also distinguishes six usages: 'throat' or 'gullet' (pp. 504–505), 'desire' (pp. 505–510), 'vital self' or 'reflexive pronoun' (pp. 510–512), 'individuated life' (pp. 512–514), 'living creature' or 'person' (pp. 515–516) and the נֶפֶשׁ of God (p. 516). Although they do not define the uses in the same way, both of them agree that the noun can be used for 'human life'. Seebass (1998:512) states that it is not used for life in general but life 'instantiated in individuals, animal or human'.

Westermann (1997:752) points out that when the word is used for 'life', it is usually the object of a verb. The verb used usually indicates 'saving a life'. One can save your own life or the life of another person. God can also save a person's life. The verbs used can also point to the preservation of life (Westermann 1997:752–753). Verbs occur in the sense of pointing to 'threats to life' or 'the loss of life'. This is often linked to the threat from one's enemies (Westermann 1997:753–754). Life is often mentioned in contrast to death (Westermann 1997:754).

■ The notion of life in the Psalms
■ Life and death

As far as the verb חיה and related words are concerned, the semantic field is the opposite of 'die' or 'death' (Gerleman 1997:414). The same is true of the noun נֶפֶשׁ, when it is used to denote 'life' (Westermann 1997:754). One can thus begin the discussion by comparing texts relating to 'life' in the psalms with texts where 'die' and 'live' or 'life' and 'death' occur together. The relationship between 'life' and 'death' can be regarded as an anthropological constant, with a tense relation between the two notions (cf. Leuenberger 2005:343).

Psalm 33:18 states that the Lord watches over those who fear him. Verse 19 follows this up by saying that the Lord saves נַפְשָׁם [their lives] from death and keeps them alive in famine. This is one of the instances where נֶפֶשׁ refers to 'life' according to Westermann (1997:752). The Lord keeps his people alive under difficult circumstances. Death could be by human hands ('military violence') or by natural causes ('famine') (DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014:317). Psalm 33:18–19 testifies to the word of the Lord remaining the same through the ages and states that his mercy transcends time and space (Witte 2002:532). In Psalm

118:17, the poet says he will not die, but will stay alive to praise the Lord in this new life given to him (Zenger & Hossfeld 2011:240). He is saved by God 'from an unwholesome death' (Kraus 1992:167). In Psalm 56:14, the poet thanks God for saving him from death so that he can walk before God in the light of life. This light of life is a gift from God (DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014:484). This keeps him on the right way. Death removes the possibility that God's children may remember and praise the Lord (Ps 6:6; Goldingay 2000:64). Remembering what the Lord did is the foundation of praise (Craigie & Tate 2004:93).

In this regard, Psalm 49 is very important. It struggles with the problem of life and death. Granot (1997:268) says the theme of this psalm is 'the levelling effect of death'. It has, however, a different perspective than the previous examples. Psalm 49:10 is the conclusion on a section of the psalm that states that humans cannot ransom themselves. In verse 10, the result of this lack of a ransom is that humans cannot live forever. The language used here reminds the reader of the redemption of the firstborn (DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014:443). Elsewhere, the noun for 'life' is especially used in contrast to death, but Psalm 49:10 states that humans are unable to live forever. Death is described as the shepherd of the people who do not trust in the Lord (v. 15; cf. Goldingay 2000:67). The foolhardy must know they cannot take their belongings with them when they die. In the long term, wealth on this earth is futile (Zucker 2005:151). However, the one who believes in God can be sure that God will deliver him from Sheol, from death, as stated in Verse 16, whereas Verse 8 states that no one can redeem himself (cf. Kraus 1993a:484; Perdue 1974:541).

In other examples, life and death are used antithetically, but again with the idea that man cannot keep on living and not die as said in Psalm 49. Psalm 89:49 presents an example of this truth when the poet asks, 'Who can live and never see death? Who can escape the power of Sheol'? Even the monarch does not escape this fate and suffers from the frailty of all humankind (Kraus 1993b:210).

In the instances where life and death are used together, two perspectives appear. The Lord saves his followers from death (although in the end they will also die; cf. Goldingay 2000:65) on the one hand; on the other hand, no person can live forever. Death is a constant threat, especially for those who do not obey the Lord.

■ Preservation of life

Because of the danger of death and the threat from enemies, the poets of the psalms frequently prayed for preservation of life. Westermann (1997:752) notes that the noun נֶפֶשׁ is frequently the object of a verb denoting preservation of life or saving a life, especially of God. With regard to saving lives, Westermann refers to Psalms 22:21, 33:18, 56:14, 86:13, 116:8, 120:2 and many others. With

regard to preserving life, he refers to Psalms 25:20, 86:2, 97:10, 121:7 and many others. Preservation of life also implies keeping evil away (Kraus 1992:100).

In many psalms, the noun חַיִּים is used to refer to 'a life saved' or 'preserved'. In Psalm 103:4, God is called the one who redeems the life of the poet from the grave, rescuing him from mortal illness (Zenger & Hossfeld 2011:34). In Psalm 119:156, the poet says the Lord's mercy is great and then asks the Lord to preserve his life according to the Lord's justice.

The verb חיה is also used in this connection. This is especially true of Psalm 119. The verb occurs 11 times in the Piel in Psalm 119. In many instances, it is an imperative directed at God with a wish or a request. HALOT distinguishes two main senses of the verb in the Piel, which is 'to let live' or 'to preserve alive' on the one hand; and, on the other hand, 'to bring back to life as when a person is ill'. The first possibility is more common and fits many of the instances in Psalm 119.

In Psalm 119:25, the Piel imperative of the verb is used in a petition that the Lord should revive the poet. The request is preceded by a statement that the poet's soul clings to the dust. 'Clinging to dust' is an expression for an almost death-like experience from which the Lord must save him. The word is the Lord's word of salvation (Kraus 1993b:416). The same verb is used in verse 31, where the poet says he clings to the ordinances of the Lord and asks not to be put to shame. In Psalm 119:107, the poet explicitly states that he is severely afflicted and therefore wishes the Lord would preserve his life. In Psalm 119:40, the wish is preceded by a statement that the poet longed for the precepts of the Lord. He wanted to keep them and because of his intention, he asks the Lord to preserve his life. This request is echoed in Verses 43, 45 and 47. In Psalm 119:159, the poet asks the Lord to consider the fact that he loves the precepts of the Lord and then asks him to preserve his life according to the Lord's love.

In Psalm 119:37, another imperative precedes the request to preserve the poet's life, namely to turn the poet's eyes away from worthless things, probably things that are morally evil. The poet asks the Lord to preserve his life in God's ways. The Targum and some Hebrew manuscripts read, 'according to your word', as in Verse 25. The Lord can preserve his life by keeping him away from what is wrong. In Psalm 119:149, another imperative occurs before the request that the Lord must preserve the poet's life. In this instance, he asks the Lord to listen to his voice because of the Lord's love. In Psalm 119:154, the first imperative asks the Lord to plead the poet's cause, and then the poet asks that the Lord should preserve his life according to his promise (word).

In Psalm 119:88, the poet asks the Lord to preserve his life according to the Lord's love. The purpose of the request is that the poet would be able to keep the Lord's decrees. In Psalm 80:19, the verb follows a request (in the previous

verse), which is expressed by a jussive ('Let your hand be […]'). In the beginning of verse 19, the poet states that they (the people) will not turn back from the Lord. This is followed by a request followed by an undertaking that reads, 'Keep us alive [Revive us], then we will call upon your name'. They know that life is a gift of God (Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:316). Psalm 85:7 is quite similar. In a rhetorical question, the poet asks if the Lord would not keep them alive (or revive them), so that his people may rejoice in him. They have endured his wrath for a long time (Tate 1998:369).

The verb occurs in the Piel perfect in Psalm 119:50. Here, the poet says he was comforted in his distress by knowing that the word or the promise of the Lord kept him alive. This links up with the previous verse, where he asks the Lord to remember his promise to him, a promise that gives him hope. It is this promise that comforts him in a time of distress, because the Lord has preserved his life in the past. In the strophe, verses 49–56, remembering plays an important part, human and divine remembrance (Tate 1998:188). In Psalm 119:93, the poet says he will never forget the Lord's precepts, because through them the Lord has preserved his life.

◼ Remaining alive

The verb חיה occurs five times in the Qal in Psalm 119 (119:17, 77, 116, 144 and 175). In the first four instances, the psalmist is the subject of the verb in the first-person singular (אֶחְיֶה). In all of these instances, this verb follows a request directed at God. If the Lord should do what the poet requests, he would be able to live and to remain alive.

In Psalm 119:77, the poet asks for the Lord's mercy, which will result in life. The request is motivated by the statement that the law of the Lord is the poet's delight. Burt (2018:687) states that delight in the law gives life. The law causes delight (Burt 2018:695). The law is creative and life-giving (Kraus 1992:34). In Psalm 119:116, the Lord is asked to support the poet so that he may live and so that his hope may not be frustrated. When a person's life is threatened, he can always hope that he will receive the Lord's mercy so that he can be revived again (Kraus 1992:164). In Psalm 119:144, the request of the poet to receive understanding from the Lord follows the statement that the Lord's decrees are righteous. Understanding will result in the poet remaining alive. In Psalm 119:175, the poet asks that he may live (a jussive of the verb, with his soul as subject). This will result in the poet praising the Lord. The request is followed by another one, namely that the ordinances of the Lord may help the poet. 'Ordinances' here may refer to the providential intervention by the Lord in the lives of his children (Tate 1998:191). These five instances of the verb in the Qal in Psalm 119 link obedience and understanding to life.

Psalm 118:17 states that the poet will not die, but will keep on living, will remain alive. He will be saved from the threat of death (Kraus 1993b:398). He will

remain alive to sing the Lord's praises. In the end, death will come, but while alive, he will proclaim the deeds of the Lord. This is the only instance where the poet is the subject of the verb in the Qal in texts other than Psalm 119.

In Psalm 22:27, the jussive is used. In this verse, the poet says that the poor will eat and be satisfied and that those who seek the Lord will praise him. This assurance is followed by a wish: 'May your hearts live forever!' (Ps 22:27). He wishes the poor might have a full and rich life, for a long time. The full life is to be near to God (Kraus 1993a:229). Related to this wish is the desire in Psalm 72:15 that the king may have a long life sustained by divine blessing (Tate 1998:224).

In Psalm 38:20, most commentators, for example Kraus (1993a:410), Craigie and Tate (2004:301) and DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner et al. (2014:357), as well as HALOT, follow the proposal of BHS to read חִנָּם for חַיִּים. DeClaissé-Walford, and Craigie and Tate, mention that this is the reading of 4QPsa[a] as well. The Vulgate and LXX, however, tried to make sense of the Hebrew by translating, 'my enemies are alive and are too strong for me'. If one follows their translation, the adjective will have the meaning 'to be alive' as in other instances. However, the proposal of BHS should be accepted, especially because of the reading of 4QPsa[a].

Although life is important and has to be preserved, the value of life can also be relativised as in Psalm 63:4, where the poet states that God's mercy or love is better than life (cf. Leuenberger 2005:361). He would rather prefer death than to be without God's love (Longman 2014:247). The poet will praise the Lord as long as he lives, with the word used for his 'lifetime' in verse 5 as discussed further. Only God's love or mercy gives value to life (Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:124). The praise of God can be regarded as the fulfilment of life (Kraus 1992:69, 77). The mercy of the Lord is worth more than the inferior life of the persecuted poet, but also more worth than life in any case (Leuenberger 2005:359). In this sense, life is more than mere existence (Leuenberger 2005:367).

■ Life in danger

The prayer of a poet to remain alive or to have his life preserved is frequently linked to threats to his life, often from his enemies. In Psalm 64:2, the poet explicitly asks God to preserve his life from the threat posed by his enemies. They are a mortal threat to his life (Hossfeld & Zenger 2005:132). In laments, it is not only the enemies that are described as a threat against the poet. Threats can include sickness, loneliness, shame and death (Brueggemann 1974:7). The protection of the Lord is mentioned in Psalm 41:3, where it is stated that the Lord will protect the faithful, keep them alive and will not give them up to their enemies. Psalm 138:7 states that the Lord will keep

the poet alive, even though he has experienced the wrath of his enemies. In Psalm 143:11, it is said the Lord will preserve the poet's life and bring him out of the trouble he is experiencing from his enemies, for the sake of the Lord's name.

In Psalm 88:4, the poet says his life is in danger, drawing near to Sheol. Sheol is a place far from God (Kraus 1992:165). Here, as in many other places, חַיִּים and נֶפֶשׁ are used in parallelism. Steiner (2015:73) says that in such instances the distinction between the two terms is blurred. In this psalm, the threat of death does not come from the poet's enemies, but God has turned against the poet. He is suffering because of the wrath of the Lord (v. 17). The same parallelism occurs in Psalm 7:6, where the poet declares that if he is guilty as charged by some, the enemy should destroy his life. In Psalm 26:9, the two words are again used in parallelism, where the poet asks for the Lord's mercy so that his life will not be terminated. Steiner (2015:73) correctly states that the loss of נֶפֶשׁ results in death.

The beginning of Psalm 55:16 has a text-critical problem that is, however, not important for the use of the adjective in the next phrase. The poet wishes his enemies would go to Sheol alive (DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014:477). The adjective is used to describe the situation of the subject of the verb during the action. The same happens in Psalm 124:2–3. In this instance, however, the poet declares that if the Lord had not protected him and his people, they would have been swallowed alive by their enemies (Goldingay 2000:67).

The word חַיָּה occurs with two distinct meanings. The one meaning is related to the use of the different words for 'life' or 'to live', while the other refers to wild animals. The second meaning is applicable where the word is used to indicate animals in general, wild animals, beasts of prey or beast-like creatures. The second meaning is not important for the study of the theology of 'life' in Psalms. It occurs in Psalms 50:10, 68:31, 74:19, 79:2, 104:11, 20, 25 and 148:10.

The word חַיָּה meaning 'life' occurs three times in Psalms (74:19, 78:50; 143:3). In all three instances, the word is used in parallelism with נֶפֶשׁ. In Psalm 74:19, the parallelism refers to the life of the Lord's poor, in Psalm 78:50, the life of the Egyptians at the time of the 10 plagues and in Psalm 143:3, the life of the poet. In Psalm 74:19, the two different meanings of this word occur in one verse. The poet asks that the soul of the Lord's dove should not be delivered to wild animals. The Masoretic Text (MT) has the singular construct, while the Peshitta, Vulgate and Septuagint have the plural. In the second part of the verse, the poet asks the Lord not to forget the life of his poor. In these instances, 'life' is used in a general sense for the life of a human being that can be terminated by animals (Ps 74:19) and by enemies (Ps 143:3). In Psalm 78:50, the threat is not against the faithful, but against the enemies, who were destroyed by God in his judgement.

■ Renewal of life

In Psalm 30:4, the verb in the Piel is used in the context of the Lord healing a person who was ill. The Masoretic Text reads as follows (Ps 30):

(v. 4) יְהֹוָה הֶעֱלִיתָ מִן־שְׁאֹול נַפְשִׁי חִיִּיתַ֫נִי מִיׇּרְדִי־בֹֽור

The verse has a Ketibh-Qere issue with regard to the second last word. The Qere wants to read that the Lord kept him alive by not allowing him to go down into the grave, reading an infinitive construct. The Ketibh has a participle that refers to those who do go down into the pit. The New International Version (NIV) follows the Qere ('O Lᴏʀᴅ, you brought me up from the grave; you spared me from going down into the pit') and the NRSV the Ketibh ('O Lᴏʀᴅ, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit'). Kraus (1993a:352), Craigie and Tate (2004:250) and DeClaissé-Walford et al. (2014:290) all prefer the Ketibh. It is clear, however, that the Lord restored the poet's life by keeping or rescuing him from the grave. In Psalm 71:20, if following the Qere, the text would read that the Lord caused the poet to see many troubles, but also revived him again from the depths of the earth. Although death is not mentioned explicitly, the poet was in mortal danger and the Lord kept him alive.

Psalm 22:30 has some text-critical issues. The verse (Ps 22) reads as follows in the MT:

אָכְלוּ וַיִּֽשְׁתַּחֲוּ֫וּ כׇּל־דִּשְׁנֵי־אֶרֶץ לְפָנָיו יִכְרְעוּ כׇּל־יֹורְדֵי עָפָר וְנַפְשֹׁו לֹא חִיָּֽה

> [All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him – those who cannot keep themselves alive.] (v. 30; [translation from NIV])

The NIV translates the singular verb at the end of the verse as a plural, in agreement with the first part of the verse. 'To keep alive' is a good translation of the Piel. However, the versions followed a different reading. The Vulgate has *et anima mea illi vivet* [and my soul will live for Him]. The LXX has almost the same: 'and my soul lives for Him' [καὶ ἡ ψυχή μου αὐτῷ ζῇ]. The Peshitta has an adjective: 'my soul is alive for Him' [ܢܦܫܝ ܠܗ ܗܝ ܚܝܐ]. The Targum goes in a different direction: ונפש רשיעא לא ייחי [and the soul of the wicked will not live].

The other three versions have 'my soul' as the subject and probably either had the adjective in their original text, or read the verb as a Qal. The last-mentioned is the reading preferred by Bar (2009:172). BHS proposes to change the negative particle to the preposition with a third-person masculine singular suffix and to read the adjective for the perfect of the verb. The reflexive use of the verb with the word for 'soul' is not common, but not impossible. If one wants to retain the MT, the meaning 'to keep alive' or 'to revive' will be in order (cf. Craigie & Tate 2004:195; DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014:232).

◼ Life and obedience

In Psalm 119:17, the poet asks that the Lord will do good to him, so that he might live and keep the Lord's word. Life and obedience are linked in this request. As discussed earlier, this link is also evident in Psalm 119:77, 116, 144 and 175. For obedience, the verb שׁמר is frequently used in Psalm 119 (Ps 119:4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 34, 44, 55, 57, 60, 63, 67, 88, 101,106, 134, 136, 146, 158, 167, 168). The verb חיה occurs frequently in this psalm, in the Qal and Piel. Real life is only possible when one obeys the Lord and asks him to keep you alive.

◼ Lifespan

In Psalm 23:6, the word is used in the expression 'all the days of my life' [כָּל־יְמֵי חַיָּי]. This expression is frequently used to indicate duration of time. The same use occurs in Psalms 27:4 and 128:5. In Psalm 30:6, the word is used on its own to indicate duration (cf. DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014:294). The Lord's anger is only for a moment, but his mercy is for a lifetime. It is also used in this way in Psalms 49:19, 104:33, 146:2 and 31:11. In Psalm 21:5, the poet refers to someone who asked for life. It is parallel to the expression 'a long life', rendering יָמִים אֹרֶךְ. In Psalm 34:13, life is parallel to days, again pointing to duration. In Psalm 133:3, a long life is called a blessing from the Lord. A long life was seen as a blessing from God (Kraus 1992:164).

◼ 'Life' in combination with other nouns

The noun חַיִּים and the adjective חַי are used in a number of expressions in the book of Psalms. In Psalm 145:16, the adjective is used in the expression כָל־חַי [every living being]. The Lord provides every living being with food (Kraus 1993b:548). He is the creator, and he takes care of his creation. The word is also used in the expression אֶרֶץ חַיִּים [the land of the living] in Psalm 27:13. The poet is certain that the Lord will save him from the dangers he is experiencing and will keep him alive. Mannati (1969:493) thinks that the expression refers to the land of Canaan in this instance. In Psalm 116:9, the word for 'land' is in the plural, but the meaning is the same as in Psalm 27. The Lord has delivered the poet from death and he will remain alive in the land of the living. He will survive the attacks of his enemies and will see the goodness of the Lord in this life (Craigie & Tate 2004:234). The expression אֶרֶץ חַיִּים occurs in Psalm 52:7 as well. Here, the Lord will remove the subject of the poet's anger from the land of the living. The righteous will remain in the land of the living, but the evildoer will be removed from it. They will remain in the land of the living because the Lord is the refuge of his faithful as stated in Psalm 142:6. In Psalm 16:11, the noun occurs in the combination 'the path of life' [אֹרַח חַיִּים]. In the previous verses, the poet states that he has a close relationship with the Lord and that the Lord will not abandon him to Sheol. The previous verses are a preparation for the statements in verse 11.

The psalm makes it clear that against death and the end of idolatry one has the perspective of the fortune of the faithful and the presence of the Lord (Quintens 1979:240). This path teaches one how and where to begin, how to progress and where this path leads to (Quintens 1979:241). The Lord has taught him the path of life, which is how to live with joy in this life (cf. Goldingay 2000:77). The expression may perhaps indicate communion with the Lord in the temple or the task of a priest instructing the people how to live (cf. DeClaissé-Walford et al. 2014:181). It is, in the words of Beuken (1980:382) 'a hopeful perspective on life despite death'. In Psalm 27:1, the Lord is called the stronghold of the poet's life, the one to whom he can safely flee when his life is in danger. This is true, because, according to Psalm 36:10, the Lord is the fountain, the source of life, the origin of all life (Kraus 1992:162). This is also the reason why the poet of Psalm 42:9 calls the Lord the God of his life. God is the one who gives life, who preserves life and who teaches his children how to live.

It is not always possible to distinguish between the noun חַיִּים and the plural of the adjective. The two possibilities are present in Psalm 69:29, where the phrase מֵסֵפֶר חַיִּים occurs. One can understand the phrase as 'the book of life' or 'the book of the living'. Hossfeld and Zenger (2005:183) keep both possibilities open. Kraus (1993b:58) translates it as 'the book of life', as do DeClaissé-Walford et al. (2014:557). Tate (1998:199) opts for 'living'. Groenewald (2003:94–96) discusses the idea of a book of life in this verse against the background of a secular list of citizenry. The idea of a heavenly book he regards as an anthropomorphism (Groenewald 2003:96). This book would then be a register of the people that would be spared from judgement (Groenewald 2003:98). The poet of Psalm 69 asks that the names of the enemies would be deleted from this book or register (Groenewald 2003:99). These people stand against the righteous, the צַדִּיקִים. It would then be better to understand the phrase as referring to 'a book of life', rather than to 'the book of the living'.

In Psalm 66:9, it will be probably better to understand the word חַיִּים as indicating living people, when the poet says God has placed their lives among the living.

■ Living God

The adjective חַי ('alive', 'living') is used three times with reference to the Lord in the psalms. In Psalm 18:47, it is used predicatively in a statement extolling the praises of the Lord: The Lord is alive (cf. Kraus 1992:23). He does not die like the idols of the nations (Kraus 1992:163). He is the one who is worthy of praise because he delivers the poet from his enemies. DeClaissé-Walford et al. (2014:200) regard the word as expressing an oath, but that is unlikely in light of the next phrase in the verse ('blessed is my rock'). In Psalms 42:3 and 84:3,

the adjective is used attributively, when God is called the 'living God'. As Kraus (1993a:439) says, the poet knows that life is dependent on God, sustained by him and determined by him. In both the psalms, the poet is longing for the presence of the Lord, but he is positive that the Lord is the living God, whose presence can be experienced in the cult.

The different uses of the word are spread fairly consistently through the five books of Psalms, with the exception of Psalm 119, where most of the verbal forms occur. In this psalm, especially three of the semantic groups discussed earlier occur quite frequently, namely the preservation of life, remaining alive and life and obedience. The issue of life and death is very important, but it does not occur very frequently in the psalms. However, one can say that the idea of life and death is fundamental for the view of life in the psalms. Preservation of life and danger to life are very important for understanding the use of נֶפֶשׁ when meaning 'life'.

■ The theological use of these words

Life and death are frequently juxtaposed. Even when death is not explicitly mentioned, the dangers threatening the faithful could lead to their death. On the one hand, the psalms tell us that man is not immortal, for example in Psalms 49:10 and 89:49. This is true of the righteous and of the evildoers. However, on the other hand, the Lord gives enduring life to his followers, for all the days of their lives. The Lord can preserve the life of his followers by keeping them from what is wrong. It is only through the Lord's mercy that his followers are kept alive to sing his praises. He keeps them safe from their enemies. He is the only one who can turn the lives of his faithful from distress to relief (Brueggemann 1974:8).

God is the living God. Life is dependent on the Lord, it is sustained by him and determined by him. The Lord is the fountain, the source of life, according to Psalm 36:10. In Psalm 119, he is the one who can revive his followers, or keep them alive. Life and God's mercy are directly connected. Psalm 119:156 states that the Lord's mercy is great and asks for preservation of life.

Meaningful life is possible only when the Lord does good to a person and that person then lives in obedience to God. This is especially clear from the use of the verb חיה in the Qal in Psalm 119. In Psalm 22:27, the poet wishes that even the poor might have a full and rich life. The Lord teaches his followers the path of life and the path towards life.

Life can also be relativised. The Lord's mercy is more important, more valuable than life itself. This is possibly the most important statement contained in the psalms' teaching on life and death. Life is more than just living, just existing. True life, life that means more than anything, is life lived in the

presence of the Lord, in the light of his mercy, following the path of life shown to man in God's mercy. This is a life of obedience, a life of thanksgiving, a life proclaiming the greatness of the Lord in all the faithful experiences.

■ Conclusion

Life is an important theme in Psalms. The Lord is the source of life; he is the one who sustains life. The life of his followers can only be meaningful when they obey the Lord in all they do. After having discussed previous theological reflection on life in the psalms, this contribution has discussed the notion of life in the psalms under the following headings:

• Life and death.
• Preservation of life.
• Remaining alive.
• Life in danger.
• Renewal of life.
• Life and obedience.
• Lifespan.
• 'Life' in combination with other nouns.
• Living God.

As regards the theological use of the relevant words, God as the source of life, life and obedience and the relativisation of life are important concepts. The notion that the Lord's mercy is more important than life deserves special attention.

Life in Job

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■ Introduction

The plot of the book of Job revolves around the loss of life, specifically, the loss of Job's life. This chapter considers the values and goals of life as the concept appears in the book of Job. Keeping in mind the fact that different sections of the book of Job may espouse different views of life's value, I separate the chapter into four parts covering the prologue, the dialogue, the divine speeches and the epilogue. Does Job's view of life change throughout the book? Does God challenge the notion of 'the good life' as it appears in the prologue and dialogue? First, the essay addresses 'the good and tragic life' in the prologue and in the dialogue. Second, I consider the contest over Job's life in the dialogue, including Job's hope for death and the restorative efforts of the friends. Third, I argue that the divine speeches address the qualitative sense of Job's life through an extended meditation on animal life. Here, God demonstrates care for wild animals, a category of species that Job associates with the wicked. Finally, I consider whether there are any signs that the restored Job of the epilogue experiences life any differently from the Job of the prologue and dialogue, arguing that there are subtle hints to Job's changed ethic of life.

Assessing the book of Job's perspective on any particular issue or concept, such as life, necessitates grappling with the dialogic nature of the book. The narrator, Job, the friends and God share some assumptions about the concept of life, but they also disagree at points. Which voice represents the book's teaching on life? In this essay, I will argue that God ultimately has the final and authoritative word in the book, but it is essential to hear the various perspectives on life in order to understand the nature and meaning of God's response.[77]

The focus of the book of Job is Job's life, both in its ontological sense (being alive) and its qualitative sense (experiencing a good or bad life). The heavenly wager over Job's fidelity is set up by the accuser's claim in Job 2:4, 'All that belongs to a man, he would give for his own life [נֶפֶשׁ]'. The נֶפֶשׁ, commonly translated as 'soul', signifies here the notion of existence.[78] The claim implies that simply being alive is the highest good for humanity. The accuser bets on Job's selfishness, expecting that he would exchange his most cherished possessions and commitments for his life. However, Job demonstrates the greater importance of living righteously over staying alive. The qualitative nature of life is of utmost importance in the dialogue, especially once Job issues his death wish in Chapter 3, where he demonstrates that he would rather die than go on living in destitution.

The remainder of this chapter works through the sections of the book, considering both the lexical significations of 'life' and the broader view of the life conceptual domain. As the book progresses from prologue to dialogue to divine speeches to epilogue, it is necessary to consider each of these parts on their own as well as how they work together to make a larger point.

■ The good and the tragic life

The book of Job begins with a depiction of the good life in the extreme. At the outset, Job's life is ideal. He is entirely upright, perfect in piety and renowned for his wealth. The apposition of the description of Job's character in Job 1:1 and his possessions in Job 1:2–3, drawn together with a simple 'and'

77. Scholars disagree about which part represents the author's perspective. Newsom (2003) argues that the book is polyphonic, so that no voice or genre is privileged over any other. Michael Fox (2005) maintains that the frame narrative determines the book's meaning and how one assesses the validity of the wisdom dialogue. In Fox's view, 'The author uses Job to test one theological stance, just as he uses the friends to test another. Both sides are given to theological absolutism, and neither has it right' (Fox 2005:359–360). For further discussion on privileged genres in Job, see Cho (2017). In my view, the divine evaluations of Job 38:2 and Job 42:7 represent an authoritative critique of Job's protest, criticizing Job for disparaging divine governance but commending him for addressing God honestly.

78. Steiner (2015) demonstrates that נֶפֶשׁ in the Hebrew Bible is not coterminous with 'body' (see Job 2:5–6) and in some texts it appears to be disembodied or at least separate from a person's 'life'. In Job 2:4, God is restricting the accuser from killing Job, so נֶפֶשׁ is the animating part of Job's life.

conjunction, implies that retribution is working just right in Job's life.[79] Job is perfect in moral and religious character and he has a perfect life. The description of Job's children, livestock and servants expresses a life of coherency with pairings that equal 10. As Newsom (2003:53) says, Job's world 'is a world in which everything adds up'. Job's possessions symbolise a life well-lived. The prologue, thus, presents a life of blessing typified by piety, abundant wealth, and a cohesive family.

Job's pre-trauma life is not carefree or without fear. Indeed, Job displays pious anxiety by regularly sacrificing burnt offerings for the sanctification of his children, just in case they might have cursed God in their hearts (Job 1:5). Clines (1989:15) suggests that Job appears to be 'neurotically anxious'. In the least, his concern for his children's safety demonstrates that he sincerely fears God and the power of God to punish secret sin. This anxious piety coheres with the broader depiction of the good life in the prologue of Job.

The book attributes Job's abundance to God's protective watch. The accuser is the first to make this connection clear by claiming that God had put a hedge around Job and his household (Job 1:10). In both of Job's early confessions, he also credits God with providing what is good (Job 1:21; 2:10). Of course, God is also responsible for the decimation of Job's good life, and Job recognises that God has both given and taken away (Job 1:21). He has received the good and the bad from the hand of God (Job 2:10). Therefore, while the prologue implies that divine retribution is at work in Job's prosperity, it overtly denies it as the principle for his ruin. Neither does Job attribute the overwhelming trouble in his life to sin. God is simply sovereign over life as the giver of both good [טוֹב] and bad [רָע].

The depiction of Job's good life is inverted by Job's demise in the prologue. Although God restricts the accuser from actually killing Job, Job still dies in a sense with the destruction of his family, his possessions and his body. In Job 1:21, Job says, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, naked I will return there'. He seems to expect to actually die without being restored, perhaps in the near future. Hebrew שָׁמָּה [there] in Job 1:21 may be a euphemism for the underworld (see also Job 3:17, 19) (Clines 1989:36–37; Seow 2013:282). Death is therefore poetically described as entering the womb of the earth as an entrance into the underworld. The return to the mother's womb is a figurative way of portraying death as a return to the dust of the earth (compare Ps 139:13–15). In the final scene of the prologue, Job sits upon a heap of ashes, expecting that his own death is immanent (Job 2:8). However, after seven

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79. The conjunction is ambiguous, and the correspondence between Job's piety and wealth is suggested more than explicit. For an argument against the causal relationship between piety and prosperity in Verses 1–2, see Cooper (1990:69).

days of sitting silently with his friends, Job continues to live, which only provokes his anger. The combination of his ontological status of being alive and qualitative status of being nearly dead sparks protest in Job, which is especially apparent in Job 3.

Glimpses of Job's former life of abundance appear throughout the dialogue. Most prominently in Job's final major speech, he reminisces about his life before God struck him down, when God 'watched over' him (Job 29:2). In those days, God's light guided him through the darkness (Job 29:3), he was in his youthful prime, and had an intimate relationship with God (Job 29:4). His domestic life flourished (Job 29:5–6), respected people of all ages listened attentively to his teaching (Job 29:7–11) and the marginalised rejoiced at his benevolence (Job 29:12–16). Job's vision for the good life is thoroughly hierarchical and from the perspective of an elite person.[80] The values of Job 29 correspond to the social structures of kinship groups, wherein male patronage is basic to community coherence (Newsom 2003:187). The patriarch's honour is one of the highest moral goods. From a critical perspective, Job's vision for the good life is self-centred. This, of course, is not surprising. Sufferers understandably are keenly aware of personal loss and it is natural for them to focus on their own pain and loss of status. Still, it is essential to recognise that Job's description of the good life is a life when all is right in the world for himself. His noble status brings others into his sphere of influence, so they also experience the good life when they are in the right relationship with him.

In contrast to this description of Job's good life, Chapter 30 depicts Job as a tragic and marginalised character. He is ridiculed by those who are younger (Job 30:1), those whom Job describes as pitiful and senseless wild animals (Job 30:3–7). His prosperity and honour have vanished (Job 30:15). He experiences pain and violence. He has become 'like dust and ashes' (Job 30:19). His only community is among the lonely and desperate desert animals (Job 30:29).[81] This passage follows others, such as Job 16:6–17, where Job accuses God of destroying his life, specifically desolating his community (Job 16:7) and deteriorating his physical body (Job 16:8). Job laments his failing body because it testifies against him, so his complaint is more about his marred reputation than his physical pain (Erickson 2013:302–304). Job's description is that of total despair and marginalisation. These chapters show that the value of life has little to do with simply being alive. Rather, the tragic life demonstrates the essential features of the good life, namely, the joy and

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80. Hamilton (2007:71) lists six elements of the elite life in Job 29: leisure to rule, deference from inferiors, rules for admission into the elite group, access to the disposable wealth of the community, predetermined rules for the proper use of wealth and religious sanctions for proper behaviour.

81. The jackal and ostrich of Job 30:29 appear in the biblical corpus as a word pair (Is 34:13; 43:20; Mi 1:8; Lm 4:3). They likely came to symbolize mourning because of their loud desert cry (Hawley 2018:168–170).

satisfaction of being respected by one's peers, surrounded by one's family and being in good health. Correspondingly, Job cares more about his good reputation and social status than his own experience of comfort or ontological existence.

Job and his friends all assume that the good life entails righteous behaviour, abundant wealth and a healthy community. These repeated features of a life that is good form the foundation for arguing that the wicked should be punished and the righteous should be rewarded. According to the wisdom dialogue, when all is right with the world, the virtuous experience the good life. The wicked, however, undergo loss of possessions, loss of community, rejection from God, shame, mourning, relentless pain, terrors and death (Job 8:20–22; 15:17–35; 18:5–21; 20:4–29). The contrast between the good life and the tragic life is on full display in the friends' 'fate of the wicked' speeches. Newsom (2003:115–125) interprets these pericopes as 'iconic narratives' meant to restore Job's trust in God's justice. Lambert (2015:561) also rightly argues that the friends' mission is not to comfort Job or explain his suffering, but to 'provoke transformation from a state of mourning to a normal state of being'. Their goal is to return Job to the good life. Foundational for this goal is a restored belief in just rewards and punishments, so they present poems to Job that exhibit the moral vision of justice and retribution. Therefore, in these texts they seek to restore Job to his good life through consolation and rebuke, but Job resists their efforts and puts little hope in returning to the past. When he does speak hopefully about his future, he constructs a new way forward rather than looking back. Thus, the future of Job's life becomes the centre piece of the dialogical contest in Job 3–27.

■ A contested life

The prologue concludes with Job sitting on the ash heap, seemingly waiting for death. After seven days of silence, he opens his mouth and curses the day of his birth, perhaps provoked by his unmet expectation for physical death. From Job's perspective, to go on living in destitution is worse than death. This longing for death evokes a response from Eliphaz and instigates the dialogue of Chapter 4 to Chapter 27. The friends take issue with Job's death wish throughout the dialogue, associating the desire for death and darkness with the wicked (e.g. Job 5:14; 15:22, 34). For example, Zophar in Job 11:20 says that the wicked will have no escape and 'their hope is the expiring of life' [וְתִקְוָתָם מַפַּח־נָפֶשׁ]. To give up on living existence is anathema to them.

Job' self-curse in Job 3:3–10 and lament in Job 3:11–26 demonstrate his utter despair at having been born. He curses the day of his birth and the announcement of his conception (Job 3:1). He calls on the powers of chaos (darkness, bareness, Leviathan) to overtake that day because he was born to

'trouble' [עָמָל] (Job 3:10).[82] He asks, 'Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and die?' (Job 3:11). His life of suffering is characterised by a lack of rest and ongoing agitation. Life is bitter (Job 3:20) and Job wants nothing more than to die (Job 3:21). He even identifies death as a hidden treasure, over which one would rejoice when discovering it (Job 3:21–22). For Job, death is superior to a life of misery. Death is the great equaliser insofar as all people experience relief and rest when life comes to an end. Again, the radically diminished quality of Job's life is essential to his view of his ontological status of being alive. As Job has no qualitative joy in life, he longs for the finality that accompanies death.

In several places, Job describes human life negatively. He generalises his own experience so that *all* human life is essentially manual labour (Job 7:1). His life in particular is even worse than those who toil all day because he endures trouble [עָמָל] throughout the night (Job 7:3–4). Job is like the living dead as his flesh is clothed with worms and dirt (Job 7:5). In addition to life being full of difficulty, Job laments the brevity of life in Chapter 7. He mourns his life [חַי] as being רוּחַ, an ephemeral wind, here and gone again like a cloud (Job 7:7–9).[83]

The concept of Job's hope [תִּקְוָה] serves as an important point of contention in the debate over Job's life. Whereas the friends assure Job that he has reason to hope for restoration (Job 4:6; 5:16), Job's singular hope is for death, more vividly, 'that God would crush me' (Job 6:8–9). In 7:6, Job evokes a weaving metaphor for the brevity of life with a pun on תִּקְוֶה, which signifies both 'hope' and 'thread'. The days of Job's life are swifter than a weaver's shuttle; they come to an end without תִּקְוָה. On the one hand, Job mourns the hopeless brevity of life. On the other hand, Job takes refuge in death because of its finality. In 7:9–10, he states his belief that those who go to Sheol do not return and are forgotten by those who go on living.

Job's hope for death is an extension of his disdain for the quality of his life. His rejection of life is evident most explicitly in his acts of protest, which he expects may bring about his final demise. He believes that God is out to torment him, so he voices his protest even if it is possibly blasphemous and dangerous. Job 9:20–24 illustrates this well. Job maintains his innocence, but recognises that his argument, namely that God destroys both the blameless and the wicked just the same (Job 9:22) and that God has given the earth into the hand of the wicked (Job 9:24), is a rejection of his life. in Job 9:21, he says, 'I am innocent; I do not know myself; I reject my life'. From the perspective of Job and his friends, the constitution of one's life reflects the content of one's speech. The good life

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82. On Job's curse as an attempt at undoing creation, see Fishbane (1971:151–167); Perdue (1986:305–308) and Pettys (2002:89–104).

83. For another 'life is short' metaphor, see Job 9:25.

flows out of a trust in and confession of God's justice. Thus, to proclaim the injustice of God is to reject life itself.

Job sees no integrity in faking contentment. In Job 9, he makes this clear:

If I say, 'Let me forget my complaint;
let me abandon my sad face; let me brighten up',
I am afraid of my pain.
I know that you will not count me innocent. (vv. 27–28)

Instead of insincerely putting on a happy face, Job persists in his complaint for the sake of his reputation. Just a few verses later, he says, 'My soul [נֶפֶשׁ] feels disgust with my life [חַי]; let me let loose my complaint upon myself; let me speak in the bitterness of my soul נֶפֶשׁ' (Job 10:1).[84] Job's נֶפֶשׁ feeling of disgust for life echoes an earlier sentiment in Job 7:15, where his נֶפֶשׁ desired strangulation and death rather than life. His disgust with life provokes his speech, as Clines (1989:244) says, 'Only a person who finds no joy in life would dare to speak as Job will of God'. His living existence is utterly bitter and he wishes for it to end, so he lets loose his accusation upon himself. At this point in the dialogue, Job's way forward nearly reflects the counsel of his wife to curse God in order to bring about death. However, as he presses into his complaint, his hope shifts from death to being recognised as innocent. He still expects and desires to rest in death (Job 10:18–22), but he begins imagining scenarios by which he might be found righteous, even if it is after he dies.

This shift towards hope appears in Job 13:13–19, where Job again resolves to speak 'come on me what may'. He anticipates that God may kill him (Job 13:15a), but commits to arguing his ways to God's face (Job 13:15b).[85] In Job 13:16, Job expresses hope for vindication, 'It will be salvation for me; that the godless will not come before him'. Job desires above all else to be declared innocent, and his persistence in arguing his case against God is the only way to this outcome. He recognises that God might strike him down for his claim, but he knows that he is right (Job 13:18) and sees no other option than to speak his accusation. For Job, the good life becomes synonymous with having a good reputation, even if his restored reputation comes posthumously.

In Chapter 19, after describing his total loss of community and lack of advocacy on the part of his friends (Job 19:13–22), he expresses his desire to have his testimony of innocence be permanently engraved in stone (Job 19:23–24). As in Job 16:18–19, where he beckons the earth, 'let there not be a

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84. For comparative texts where the נֶפֶשׁ is not equivalent with a person's life, see Steiner (2015:125), who argues that the נֶפֶשׁ has a spatial location, but is not equivalent to the body; rather, it is a physical entity of consciousness. This makes good sense in texts such as Job 10:1, as Job's נֶפֶשׁ has emotion.

85. Job 13:15b is a point of ancient controversy. I read with the *Ketiv*, 'I will not wait', rather than the Qere, 'I will wait for him'. In my view, Job is claiming that God may kill him for what he is speaking, but he will not wait to speak; rather, he will argue his ways to God's face (Hawley 2018:75).

resting place [מָקוֹם] for my outcry' and recognises his witness [עֵד] in heaven, his wish in Chapter 19 is for the ongoing life of his accusation, which anticipates his confession that he has an advocate, here labelled as 'a redeemer' (גֹּאֵל, Job 19:25). Whatever the identity of his redeemer, which could be God, an angel or simply his permanent testimony, it will live on after Job has been destroyed (Job 19:26a), so that he will, as he says, 'see God away from my flesh' (Job 19:26b).[86] It may be that Job entertains resurrection in this passage. However, it is more likely that he anticipates living on through his words even after he dies.[87] After his flesh is stripped from him, he will encounter God when God eventually hears his case and declares him to be innocent. Enduring life resides in vindication and a lasting good reputation. Alternatively, Job may distinguish his self from his body in Job 19:26, so that he has a legal encounter with God away from his deteriorating flesh that bears witness against him (Erickson 2013:295–313).[88]

It is clear that Job's hope in Chapter 31 is no longer for death, but it is not for 'the good life' either. Rather, it is to be proven and announced as innocent. This hope is progressive in Job's speeches. In Job 14:13, Job wishes that God would 'hide' him in Sheol until divine wrath had passed. The underworld is a place to experience relief from divine scrutiny. He hopes that eventually God would cover any iniquity so that he may be restored in reputation. But this 'hope' [תִּקְוָה] is destroyed by God as surely as water wears away stones (Job 14:18–22). Job turns away from this desire for Sheol in Job 17:13–16, because he wonders if he looked to Sheol as his house, where his hope [תִּקְוָה] would be (Job 17:15). Who would see it? Hope would go down to Sheol with him (Job 17:16). The tragedy of death for Job would be that his case and hope for vindication would die as well.

This survey of Job's shift in hope addresses a bigger issue for our theme of life. Although Job no doubt agrees with the friends that a good life is one that features abundant possessions, a well-ordered community, and security under God's careful watch, what he desires more than 'the good life' is to be acknowledged as righteous. His identity as an upright person of status becomes his primary concern. God has unjustly impugned his moral character (Job 9:30–31; 16:8), and Job wants above all else for this injustice to be made right. At root for Job, the concept of a quality life is founded on being recognised as pious, so much so that he conceives of his life continuing on even after his physical death through his legacy of innocence. Just as a child

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86. Clines (1989:459–461) provides various interpretations of the identity of Job's 'redeemer' and the argument that it is Job's outcry that will witness for him in heaven.

87. See Job 14:7–14 for Job entertaining the idea of resurrection but deciding against it.

88. For Job's body bearing witness against him, see Job 16:8.

may in a sense carry on the life of the parent, so one's reputation may live on after death. Life is prolonged in the memories of the community.

■ The wild life

Although the topic at hand is human life, the book of Job addresses humanity in part through an extended meditation on animal life. When YHWH finally breaks his silence, he encounters Job with numerous images of the wild to reframe Job's view of divine order [עֵצָה]. YHWH's rhetorical questions probe Job about his knowledge of and control over the wild world of weather and animals. The particular images of wild animals demonstrate God's care for and joy in the wild. For example, the speech implies that God feeds the lion and the raven, watches over the birthing of the wild goat and sets the wild donkey free to feed on desert grasses. YHWH presents himself as a wildlife manager. He even manages the super-beasts, Behemoth and Leviathan, and he does so with admiration for these beings. The essential point in YHWH's speeches is that Job is incapable of ordering and managing all living creatures. However, a subtler and more meaningful point is also made, namely that YHWH evaluates the wild world differently than Job does. On the basis of Job's evocations of images of the wild throughout the dialogue, one may reasonably conclude that divine care for wild and chaotic entities would have come as a surprise to him.[89] For Job and his friends, God is a divine warrior who battles (or *should* battle) the wicked. Wild animals are a regular symbol for divine enemies in the dialogue. However, according to the divine speeches, God revels in nurturing the wild creatures.

The divine warrior motif, wherein God battles and defeats the powers of chaos (the sea, sea monsters and other wild entities), appears throughout the dialogue (Job 3:8; 4:10–11; 7:12; 9:8; 10:16; 26:12–13) as the assumed creation narrative of Job and his friends. The desert, non-predatory animals also appear as images of pity and disdain in Job 24:5 and Job 30:3–8. As YHWH shows up in a tempest and claims to care for entities usually identified with destruction and threat, God might be understood as siding with danger and injustice.[90] However, order remains in the world of the wild as YHWH describes it, and God still limits the destructive power of the sea and Leviathan. These are not tame entities, but neither are they divine enemies that represent evil or anti-creation. YHWH's self-presentation is that of a sage in Job 38–41, rather than a divine warrior (see also Fox 2013:3; Habel 1992:21, 25; Lévêque 1994:217; Jones 2013:855). This is in line with Genesis 1, where God determines the boundaries for the sea and creates the

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89. For the wild animals in the wisdom dialogue, see Doak (2014:103–181) and Hawley (2018:109–178).

90. Tsevat (1966:102–104) argues that God's speeches deny divine retribution and divine concern with justice. Tsevat does not claim that God sides with evil, but that God's perspective is amoral, insofar as he works outside of the causal connection between a person's fate and his or her moral actions.

sea monsters all as part of the good creation. God speaks wisdom and order in both Genesis 1 and Job 38–41. As in Genesis 1, there is no battle against chaos in Job 38–41 and all living creatures are essentially good, even if they potentially threaten the fragile lives of humans.

What might these animal images have to do with Job's life? Although most of the tropes of the wild do not evoke the concept of human life, God reveals that two of the images are explicitly *not* for the benefit of people.

First, Job 38:

> Who has split a channel for the flood
> and a path for the thunderbolt
> to make it rain on the land where there is no human [לֹא אִישׁ]
> a wilderness with no person in it [לֹא אָדָם בּוֹ]
> to satisfy the dry and desolate land
> and to make flourish the source of grass? (vv. 25–27)

Job knows that God is the one who brings the rain, so YHWH's point is not to inform Job of this meteorological point. However, it may come as a surprise to Job that the purpose of God's rain is to water the arid land where no human lives. God's creative work is not exclusively for the benefit of people. On the surface, 'no human' and 'no person' is simply a way of describing these uncivilised and uncultivated lands. However, when we consider these phrases in the full context of the divine speeches, they evoke a more significant meaning, namely, that the scope of divine concern is not centred on human good. YHWH does not deny divine care for humanity, but he offers a challenge to humanity's egocentric view of the cosmos and self-orientated social structures such as what we see in Job 29.[91]

The second text that marks the wild as flourishing without concern for human wellbeing is Job 39:

> Who set the wild ass free
> or loosed the fetters of the onager,
> for which I have made a habitat in the desert plain
> and a dwelling place in the salt lands?
> He laughs at the commotion of the city.
> He does not obey the shouts of the driver.
> He searches the mountains for his grazing land
> and seeks after every green thing. (vv. 5–8)

From a human perspective, the wild ass was commonly perceived as a beast of rebellion and despair because it refused domestication (Hawley 2018:148–149). Job 24 and Job 30 evoke both of these associations. In Job 24, Job metaphorically imagines the poor to be wild asses on account of their destitution (Job 24:5). They are a symbol of pity. In Job 30, Job

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91. For the divine speeches responding to Job's construal of the world in Job 29–30, see Pelham (2012:179) and Newsom (1994:9–27).

badmouths his detractors who make fun of him by calling them wild animals, including portraying them as wild asses braying in the wilderness (Job 30:7) (Hawley 2018:156–166). Job evokes such wild animal metaphors because he and his audience share the assumption that the wild ass is destitute, a despised and pitied animal. However, when God questions Job about the ass, he presents it with pride and joy. God relishes the way in which the wild ass laughs at human civilisation and refuses domestication. In addition, it has plenty to eat and flourishes in mountains away from people. From YHWH's perspective the wild ass's desert habitat and scavenging are signs of self-sufficiency and freedom, rather than marginalisation and struggle.

What does this have to do with the way that Job understands his life? First, the wild images in the divine speeches serve to correct Job's darkening of divine order (see Job 38:2). God's speeches present a challenge to Job's construal of a cosmos run without concern for order or justice by parading the well-ordered world of the wild before Job. This is a world that God governs with sovereign care, intentionality and joy. Second, the divine speeches challenge the foundations of the way Job views the margins. YHWH's view of the wild effectively decentres humanity as the purpose and sole focus of divine work (Jones 2013:854). In Job's depictions of 'the good life', he is the centrepiece and the domestic sphere is the singular location of goodness. The wild symbolises evil for Job because it poses a threat to the domestic life, but YHWH's overwhelmingly positive view of the wild in the divine speeches reframes the wild as good. All living creatures, domestic and wild, appear to have a positive value in God's eyes.

God's reframing of the wild serves as a critique of an egocentric view of anthropocentrism, insofar as it critiques the social structures on display in Job 29, wherein all is right with the world when elite people are the central beneficiaries of God's concern.[92] In Job's view, those entities that threaten human order and safety are necessarily classified as enemies of God. In contrast, God's rhetorical questions demonstrate divine care for these threatening beasts. God does not deny the threat. God also does not deny the value of humanity. After all, God is appearing and speaking to a person. Still, YHWH's speeches show that divine concern does not revolve around human safety. Even if certain living creatures serve no benefit to humanity or even threaten the wellbeing of humanity (e.g. the lion), God holds all created things in high esteem. The prime example of this is Leviathan, but also the sea, the desert land where no person lives, and all of the wild animals. All life seems to have equal worth to God.

92. Some would push this a bit more than I would. For example, Schifferdecker (2008:100) describes the divine speeches as 'radically "nonanthropocentric."' In this way, she argues, Job 38–41 differs from the anthropocentric view of creation in Genesis 1–3 and Psalm 8.

YHWH's speeches provide a counter framework for human perspective on the land and the wild. This is not a vision for a future peace like what we have in Isaiah 11, where the wolf and lamb lie down together. Rather, YHWH describes the wild as it is. There is competition and violence, obvious in the images of the ground-nesting bird, the horse and the vulture. YHWH embraces these features as the created, good order. In spite of the violence, the poetic rhythms in YHWH's speeches produce an image of ecological harmony. The main source of conflict is not between the wild things, but between the wild and the domestic. And here we have the rhetorical point of YHWH's speeches. In the dialogue, Job and his friends decry all things wild as wicked, deprived or pitied. On the basis of this negative evaluation, Job testifies that he has been wrongly categorised as God's enemy. God responds by reframing Job's suffering, by portraying the wild as good, enjoyable and valuable. The good world involves suffering. Job may truly find the ostrich and the jackal to be his new family (Job 30:29), but God seems to say that he is in good company.

According to the divine speeches, suffering is a part of the good world. God still maintains the categories of the righteous and the wicked (Job 38:13, 15; 40:12); therefore God is not amoral or siding with the wicked in Job 38–41 (Fox 2013:1–23). Neither does God necessarily view suffering itself as 'good'. Rather, it is a tolerable and necessary part of an ordered world that is, on the whole, a good world. Under God's supervision, animals prey on one another. God neither fixates upon nor denies the violence of the wild world. Rather, violence and death are assumed as a natural part of animal life and, by extension, human life.

The divine speeches set a trajectory for human perspective on life that is outside of human control. On the one hand, the speeches seem to align well with the perspective of Psalm 8, wherein the psalmist lauds the majesty of God while observing the glorious skies. This sense of wonder at God's expansive creation evokes awe that God would care so much for humanity. On the other hand, in Psalm 8, as in Genesis 1, people are given dominion over the other living creatures (Ps 8:6). This note of human rule is missing from the divine speeches. Job 38–41 pushes readers to consider the nonhuman world as valuable and independent from the human world, setting the foundations for a theological argument on ecological care that is beyond speciesism, that is, an 'attitude of bias in favour of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species' (Singer 2009:6).[93] As God values the life of species that offer no economic or health benefit to domestic life, the divine speeches suggest that humanity should also value such creatures and curb efforts that harm animal life in the name

93. Singer's work is foundational for recent work in biblical studies and posthumanism (ed. Koosed 2014).

of human progress. Moreover, fascination with the wild world is appropriate not because of what we can learn for human benefit (e.g. scientific study of animals for the sake of human good), but because learning inspires respect and awe for the animals themselves and their creator. I am not arguing that the book of Job is concerned with modern scientific endeavours, but that the theological positioning of the divine speeches provides an effective framework for considering contemporary issues of human intervention in the world of the wild.

■ The restored life

Although innocent suffering is acknowledged as a feature of God's good world, it is not hailed as a good in and of itself. The book concludes with God rightly bringing an end to Job's suffering. Even in the prologue, God recognises that an injustice has been done to Job (Job 2:3), but sets aside divine concern for justice in order to test Job or at least to allow Job to show his uncoerced piety. When Job demonstrates the full extent of his selfless concern for the other by interceding for his friends while he is still suffering, God 'restores what was taken away' (Job 42:10). This restoration is not a reward for Job passing the test; rather, it is God making reparations, paying back twice the amount that was taken from Job (cf. Ex 22:3–8) (Clines 2011:1237; Gordis 1978:498). God admits treating Job unjustly and, in the end, seeks to compensate Job. God is sovereign and chooses to make reparations as an act of grace.[94]

The final narrative of Job's restoration is ambiguous with regard to Job's characterisation. Is Job returned to his old pre-trauma life or is there something new about his post-trauma life?[95] In my view, Job is restored to his former health and status, but his encounter with the God of the whirlwind does not return him to the place from which he came in every respect. Job makes it clear in his final response that he has seen God as he never had before (Job 42:5). There are also a few subtle clues that the Job of the epilogue has a different view of life than the Job of the prologue. First, the

94. Some see grace as the only motivation for God's act of restoration (Habel 1985:585; Wilson 2015:208–209). However, there is concern for both grace and justice in the final scene of Job. God has wronged Job as God is freely allowed to do. God also makes reparations to Job, deciding out of divine prerogative to institute justice.

95. It is common for Joban scholarship to depict the epilogue as a resumption of the prologue, the two parts representing an older folk tale that stands apart from the poetic units of the book of Job. Multiple conflicting voices represented in a single book usually coheres with accounting for the redaction history of the book, wherein one voice seeks to correct the other (Fisher 2009). Newsom (2003) argues that the book of Job is polyphonic, but she seeks to place all of the voices on equal standing without attributing the book's inner-conflict to a diachronic editorial process. I would not blankety deny theories of diachronic composition or the multiple voices in conflict throughout the book of Job, but I think it best, especially for summarizing the book's theology, to assess the book in its current canonical form. Thus, the epilogue should be read in light of all that has come before, rather than simply picking back up on the prologue.

absence of slaves in the list of Job's possessions distinguishes Job's household from that which the prologue describes. Job has twice the number of domestic animals, but there is no mention of slaves (Good 1990:387). This is a striking omission, given that every other category of possessions in the prologue also appears in the epilogue. To be sure, the world of the epilogue remains patriarchal, but perhaps this suggests that Job now has a relatively more egalitarian perspective on life.

The most prominent change in the epilogue appears in Job's treatment of his daughters. There is nothing said in particular about the seven sons, but the text gives special attention to the names of the daughters. Moreover, Job gave them an inheritance along with their brothers. Although this may simply indicate that *even* the daughters benefited from Job's abundant wealth, it hints at Job's revised understanding of and concern for the margins. Daughters in Israel would inherit land only if there was no male heir (Nm 27:1–8); thus, Job demonstrates an unusual policy of equity with his daughters (Habel 1985:585).[96] Again, Job's world remains thoroughly patriarchal, especially apparent in the narrative's lack of concern for Job's wife, who is the mother of 20 children in the end. Nevertheless, in comparison with the prologue, the prominence of the typically marginalised daughters signifies a new perspective on social equity (Good 1990:390). 'Inheritance' [נַחֲלָה] is only otherwise used in Job in the context of retribution, the wicked person receiving his inheritance or punishment (Job 20:29; 27:14–17; 31:2–3). However, in Job 42:15, Job doles out inheritance without regard to merit or a system of rewards (Ngwa 2005:116).

The last line of the book of Job says, 'Job died, old and full of days'. His life is given the highest evaluation. Although many of the features of the good life appear in Job's final days (a caring community, abundant wealth and a legacy of children), elevated status is missing from the description. The notions of Job's anxious piety and righteous behaviour are also absent from the narration of Job's latter days. One might suppose that these missing features are implied by Job's land ownership and extreme wealth. However, in light of the more egalitarian traces in the epilogue, it seems we have a Job who cares less about being respected, who values the marginalised the same as those with higher cultural status and perhaps worries less about his children's secret sin. The 'good life' at the end of Job exhibits more joy and contentment than the depiction in the prologue.

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96. Gordis (1978:498–499) concedes this point, but provides a few examples of women in real estate in the post-exilic era, when the book of Job was likely composed. Still, the text of Job makes a special point of the daughters' inheritance, indicating that it is unexpected. Clines (2011:1237–1238) dismisses any hint at egalitarianism and takes the view that the daughters' inheritance is merely a sign of Job's patriarchal status and wealth. He argues that the daughters' beauty was the reason for their special treatment.

▪ Conclusion

There is much to be said for reading the book of Job as a multivocal conversation, with the reader called to evaluate the distinct perspectives on Job's life. However, it is my view that God's voice is intended to be authoritative and ultimately to represent the book's perspective. Therefore, if we are to summarise the book's view of life and its values, we ought to look primarily at the final five chapters (Job 38–42). Of course, these chapters respond to the prologue and wisdom dialogue, so the entire book participates in making its point about life. With this in mind, the book presents the goal of life as living with integrity before God no matter the outcomes. Job is ultimately commended for speaking honestly to God (Job 42:7).[97] Although he was wrong about the way that God runs the world (Job 38:2), he maintained his innocence at all costs and rightly spoke his protest. God makes it clear in Job 38–41 that all life has tremendous value, even the life of the wild things that offer no benefit to people. Job's life also has value because he too is a beloved creature. What is new to Job is the disjunction between the value of one's life and one's status among people. Job 29–30 typify Job's old view, and the divine speeches challenge the correspondence of value and status. In the end, Job is at home with other beloved wild things.

Besides living with integrity and speaking honestly to God, the absence of concern with status implied by the epilogue provokes a secondary goal of life, namely, contentment. No doubt righteous behaviour remains important throughout the book of Job. It is typified in the equal treatment of the daughters in Job's latter days. However, the extremely cautious piety evident in offering burnt offerings for his children each time they got together for dinner just in case they cursed God in their hearts is absent in the epilogue. Perhaps, this is because Job has learned about the value of life and the lack of control that he has over life circumstances. There is a contentment that comes with serving God without concern for the benefits, but nevertheless enjoying the benefits when they come.

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97. The text in Job 42:7, כִּי לֹא דִבַּרְתֶּם אֵלַי נְכוֹנָה כְּעַבְדִּי אִיּוֹב, is most plainly translated as, 'For you have not spoken *to me* rightly as my servant Job has'. In every other occurrence of דִּבֶּר אֶל in the book of Job, it is 'to speak *to*' (Job 2:13; 4:2; 4:12; 13:3; 40:27; 42:9).

Life in Proverbs

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■ Introduction

The book of Proverbs presents broad, general sayings outlining how to live well (or not so well!) within a community. It speaks of issues of daily life such as the following:

- Parenting.
- The effects of habitual sloth, gossip, drunkenness, adultery.
- Proper speech.
- Patterns and choices in life.
- A lifelong pursuit of wisdom.
- The importance of finding the right mate and being the right mate.

Proverbs puts these and other observations about life in three inclusions; two are the king (Pr 1:1; 30:1) (Solomon and Lemuel respectively) and the fear of the Lord (1:7; 31:30).

Throughout its 31 chapters, Proverbs examines life. Personified characters like Folly, Wickedness and Wisdom cross its pages. Success in life is not a goal but an ongoing, lifelong balance of spiritual, physical and ethical matters. Unlike Wisdom Literature elsewhere in the ancient Near East, Proverbs acknowledges that wisdom is a quality of Israel's God, a gift from God and accessible to those who seek God.

The book of Proverbs, known in Hebrew as *meshalim*, describes a well-managed life (Kidner 1985:18). It contrasts 'choosing the life of wisdom and the life of folly' (Fee & Stuart 2003:232). Within its unifying concept of the fear of the Lord (Pr 1:7), Proverbs describes how to live with others and how to be at peace with oneself. It contains approximately 40 references to *life* and cognate words like *living*.

Brueggemann (2003:306) lists three possibilities for the context, the settings, of Proverbs:

- home
- school
- royal court.

I add a fourth, the marketplace.

This chapter on Proverbs combines literary and canonical methodologies. It explores literary aspects like character, conflict, plot, point of view, tone, language and setting (Lostracco & Wilkerson 2008:1–59). It examines how Proverbs looks at life. Proverbs sees patterns of well-drawn personalities and distinct choices of behaviour. This chapter examines the commands and advice Proverbs gives on how to live wisely in one's horizontal sphere – marriage, family, neighbourhood, town and nation – and how to live humbly (for that is a lovely trait of wisdom) in one's vertical relationship with the Lord.

A canonical methodology acknowledges the following:

- Scripture is authoritative in its final form.
- When addressing a question, it looks at the entire canon.
- It seeks a consistent witness that can be understood as normative theological or ethical teaching (Johnson-Leese & Scholer 2002:xxxv).

Proverbs differs fundamentally from other biblical books. It lacks significant sections on prophecy, law, religious observance, prayers, songs and Israelite history. Instead it looks broadly at present life in the covenant community and presents observations about recurring patterns and probable outcomes.

These observations are not promises or prophecies or direct words from the Lord; instead they are generalities that generally hold true. Proverbs presents these theological truths:

- Yes, all Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tm 3:16–17).

- Yes, Proverbs shows the interaction of God's guidance and inspiration with human wisdom and human editing.
- Yes, Proverbs is both a very human book and a very divine one.

This chapter looks at material in Proverbs through the lens of life and discusses aforementioned topics and the following subjects:

- the fear of the Lord
- sages, creation and imagination
- the teaching of the father
- characters
- advice regarding major life situations
- the 'better than' proverbs
- life and death
- a happy home
- the Lord's presence in Proverbs

Selections from Rabbinic thought, poetry and hymns punctuate some entries.

■ Overview of the concept of life in Proverbs

Proverbs teaches via exaggeration. It presents patterns of behaviour through hyperbole; it illustrates the characteristics and consequences of both wicked and upright living through imaginative vignettes. Proverbs shows how ordinary people live extraordinary lives when choosing to live under the Lord's wise watch-care.

The book contains observations on life that reflect general principles that hold true over time. Neither promises nor prophetic utterances, they are 'commonly held wisdom' (Camp & Fontaine 2006; Pr 1:1n:851). Proverbs offers practical life goals but no legal guarantees from God (Fee & Stuart 2003:235).

Proverbs repeats itself. Heim (2013) states that approximately 24% of the book, some 223 verses, is repetition. Repetition works as a teaching tool and a parenting skill. Repetition in Proverbs explores life from different angles. Similarly, the gospels look at Jesus in four different ways.

In modern terms, Proverbs is a how-to-do-it manual. Its teachers were initially both parents (Pr 1:8; 4:3) with the father leading. Later in larger settings, other wise men, often called sages, took over. In common with today's thinking, Proverbs stresses lifelong learning and refresher courses. In modern terms, it's *Life for Dummies.*

The book is broadly organised for parental home schooling (ch. 1 to ch. 9) and short sayings called aphorisms (ch. 10 to ch. 31). These succinct, pithy and often profound verses describe conflicts and contemporary situations in daily living. Written as poetry, they invite imagination.

Wisdom Literature comprises Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job. Ecclesiastes looks backwards on life and Job seeks wisdom in the midst of suffering. Proverbs combines the concepts that wisdom can be learned because it is a skill and that this skill is a gift from God. Longman (2008:539) considers Proverbs the Hebrew Bible's preeminent collection of wisdom. Van Leeuwen (2008:174) adds, 'It takes wisdom to use wisdom'.

However, Proverbs seems disjointed. Yes, it fans out in many directions. From Chapter 10 onwards, Proverbs leapfrogs from verse to verse and topic to topic. Here are two examples that show how Proverbs illustrates life in the marketplace.

First, Proverbs often seems like art time in a first-grade class. Happy chaos dominates. Projects like planting seeds and drawing thank you notes are stations at tables. Tools like dirt, clay pots, brushes, paper and scissors centre the work areas like flowers. Learning and laughter occur simultaneously. After a while, the wise teacher, her oversized shirt spotted with evidence of similar times, calls for clean-up. 'Be tidy for tomorrow', she admonishes, her voice rising over the chatter.

Second, Proverbs also resembles the busy lobby of a four-star hotel. Diverseness dominates. In one corner a group wearing green baseball caps gets organised for a city tour. At the entrance, two friends loudly hail each other and head for a morning coffee. A business deal takes place around a table with bar stools. The righteous appreciate the presence of hefty doormen in red uniforms; they ask questions, get directions and feel safe. But the wicked slink past these authority figures, trying not to be observed.

■ Explicit occurrences of 'live' and 'life' in Proverbs

Table 10.1 shows the occurrences of explicit references to life in Proverbs:

The 34 references to life [חַי] predominantly mean 'life at its best' (Smick 1981:281). The majority of times חַי occurs in Proverbs is in reference to quality of life (Brensinger 1997:111). Additionally, the concepts of honour, prosperity and even immortality (see Pr 12:28) associated with life are contrasted with

TABLE 10.1: The occurrence of חַי and חָיָה in Proverbs.[98]

Reference to life	Number of occurrences	Verses (in Proverbs)
חַי	34x	1:12; 2:19; 3:2, 18, 22; 4:10, 13, 22, 23; 5:6; 6:23; 8:35; 9:11; 10:11, 16, 17; 11:19, 30; 12:28; 13:12, 14; 14:27, 30; 15:4, 24, 31; 16:15, 22; 18:21; 19:23; 21:21; 22:4; 27:27; 31:12
חָיָה	4x	4:4; 7:2; 9:6; 15:27

98. This table was compiled with the aid of Lisowsky's (1958) Hebrew concordance and the search function of Logos Bible Software. The author is grateful for the help and comments of Albert J. Coetsee.

trouble, punishment and death (Brensinger 1997:2:111). In four occurrences, 'life' is used in connection with a living creature, wild animals and clean and unclean animals (Kiuchi 1997:113).

All four occurrences of the verb חָיָה in Proverbs are linked to obedience. The phrase 'and live' or 'will live' is repeated. For example, keeping certain commandments or refraining from certain actions will result in life: a child keeping the commandments (instructions) of his father will 'live' (Pr 4:4; 7:2); the one who lays aside immaturity (Pr 9:6) or those who hate bribes (Pr 15:27), will 'live'.

■ Sages

Proverbs' authors, the sages, looked to creation to teach them about God and society. They found that the order in creation – cosmos, earth and humankind – entwined in an order that was 'life-sustaining' (Perdue 2000:34). They saw ethics in creation and looked for it in the marketplace.

In a sense, the sages followed today's standard academic procedure: They read existing wisdom documents, took what they wished, refined it and added their own contributions.

The sages produced a 'divine paradigm for society' (Perdue 2000:34). They saw God as Sage. God established a just order at creation 'and continued to maintain its functioning through life-enhancing blessing and punishing judgement' (Perdue 2000:34).

■ Creation

The sages saw the world not only had order but also made sense (Perdue 2000:36). Why? Because all creation reflects God's wisdom (Carvalho 2010:386). The sages took what they learned from the stars and flowers and applied it to the marketplace. God, the Creator, is the centre of reality as we know it, be it cosmos or city (Perdue 2000:36).

Looking at Genesis 1, the sages noted that God (Carvalho 2010:393):

• Creates effortlessly.
• Created the universe and its components without the aid of other gods.
• Created a good creation.
• Put his nature and image in humans more so than in other creatures.

Then the sages looked at human life and posited that it, too, could and did reflect God's order. Carvalho (2010:387) believes they saw a hierarchy and a niche into which every person was born and belonged. Opposing this order signified rebellion; indeed, the earth trembles when a servant girl usurps her mistress (Pr 30:21–23)!

They asked, 'Where is God? How can we better understand the One who created the cosmos by what we see here of life in the marketplace?' Their answer? The book of Proverbs.

Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (2004) caught this 'Aha!' moment with 'Pied Beauty'; enjoy its first stanza:

'Glory to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-fire coal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim'. (p. 59)

Imagination

Imagination serves as a teaching tool in Proverbs (Stewart 2016:351). Imagination thinks in terms of life's possibilities and acknowledges that human beings are both imaginative and moral beings (Stewart 2016:351). Imagination employs images, riddles, metaphors and narratives. It practices discernment.

Imagination helps when choices are ambiguous. From Proverbs 10:1 on, Proverbs' teaching speeds up. Gone are the long lessons from the earlier nine chapters; this section has fewer lengthy personality portraits but more succinct images of one to three verses that engage the imagination and tell what to do in difficult and ordinary situations.

By employing both imagination and reasoning, Proverbs becomes more complex and certainly is far from being simple or naïve (Stewart 2016:372).

Using life as a teaching model, Chapter 1 to Chapter 9

Proverbs opens with the father and son setting off on a course seemingly called Learning Wisdom. It employs imagination and resembles today's home schooling. The father or teacher is a lecturer, grader, mentor. He wants his son or student to succeed and learn concepts, for they are life (Pr 1:3).

The first lesson

The father or teacher seems to have this lesson plan: Scare the son or student!

That first lesson involves an imaginative story of a gang-like situation in which scoundrels approach the son (a potential recruit) and encourage him to join them in waylaying, robbing and even murdering a 'harmless soul' (Pr 1:10–11). The gang promises easy plunder (Pr 1:13–14).
The father or teacher disagrees.

His first lesson ends with this caution: Those gang members unknowingly plot their own ruin; their schemes eventually take their lives (Pr 1:18–19).

Poet Gwendolyn Brooks (n.d.) captures the essence of those bad companions in Proverbs 1 as follows:

> We real cool. We
> Left school. We
>
> Lurk late. We
> Strike straight. We
>
> Sing sin. We
> Thin gin. We
>
> Jazz June. We
> Die soon. (n.p.)

■ The second lesson

The father's second lesson continues this scare tactic: Yes, son, it is possible to choose death. Lesson Two imagines another well-known youthful temptation, an older woman initiating a young man into sex (Pr 2:16–19). This woman, described as an adulteress and wayward wife, has left the partner of her youth and ignores the covenant she made in front of God. Entering her house and participating in activities therein lead 'down to death' (Pr 2:18).

The father or teacher portrays the adulteress as foolish. She gives no thought to her way of life; she follows crooked paths but does not even know they are crooked. However, her actions, the father or teacher warns the son or student, prey upon 'your very life' (Pr 5:6). Visiting her is a stupid thing for a smart young man to do. That youth resembles a bird going into a snare; frequenting an adulteress will cost that youth his life (Pr 6:26; 7:23).

These two initial teaching sessions smack of life's realism. The son probably already has heard such talk of gangs and sex among older boys. He may be surprised that his father seems to know about those topics! Brueggemann (2003:308) comments that a major part of wisdom is to educate a young person 'to discern the world rightly'.

In a sense, Chapter 2 is a syllabus. In modern terminology, it provides Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). The father states his teaching method involves wisdom, understanding and knowledge of God (Pr 2:2–5).

The son, expected to be a successful student, will have these results, these SLOs. By the end of the course: The son 'will walk in the ways of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous'. The son will be an upright man 'and will live in the land' (Pr 2:20). The son will differ from the wicked who 'will be cut off from the land and the unfaithful torn from it' (Pr 2:21). The son is

learning, through this and other teachings, 'a right ordering of life' (Brueggemann 2003:310).

The father's next instructions (ch. 3 to ch. 4) take a positive tone. He frames his lessons on the concept of long life. Heeding his teaching means 'that the years of your life may be many' (Pr 3:2, 4:10). The son or student learns the importance of memorising his father's words, for they will keep him 'on the way of wisdom' (Pr 3:21); they will help him throughout 'normal life and in times of disaster' (Ross 1991:5:920).

The father or teacher introduces the son or student to Wisdom, one I call Lady Wisdom (Branch 2016:8–25). She is personified (Goldberg 1980:104). If the son embraces the lifelong teaching of Lady Wisdom, she will become for him a tree of life and bring him many blessings (Pr 3:18). The son must learn that judgement and discernment are life (Pr 3:22). The father and Lady Wisdom's teaching, if practiced, will bring the son a prosperous life (Pr 3:2).

The father or teacher links emotions, intellect and drive to his instruction. He admonishes the son or student to 'above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life' (Pr 4:23).

The son or student, tutored through those first nine chapters, is ready for the marketplace!

■ Characters in life as portrayed in Proverbs

Proverbs shows human life comprises a series of choices (Fee & Stuart 2003:227). It presents characters who make choices and portray lifelong behaviour patterns of wisdom and folly. These are discussed further.

■ Kings

The Bible does not endorse one form of earthly government but comments instead on attributes of rulers and societies. The Bible shows that governance exists in all forms of life: family, community, country. The ideal government someday will be a theocracy, when God dwells in the midst of his people (Zph 3:16–17). But in the meantime, Proverbs illustrates both bad and good rulers. A tyrannical ruler lacks judgement (Pr 28:16). Lady Wisdom regally says that by her 'kings reign and rulers make laws that are just' and princes govern (Pr 8:15–16). Yes, by wisdom, righteous rulers 'remain in power' (Ross 1991:1107).

A good king with a reputation for justice gives his domain stability; however, bribes can bring down even that kingdom (Pr 16:13).

In life, Proverbs' sages side with the status quo. They advise fearing the Lord and not joining a rebellion against a king (Pr 24:21). Why? Because the

king and the Lord may send sudden destruction upon the rebellious (Pr 24:21–22).

People have opinions about their rulers. When the righteous rule, the people rejoice; they groan under wickedness (Pr 29:2). Proverbs provides insightful comments on the wicked in leadership. When the wicked rise to power, people hide; but when the wicked perish, the righteous thrive (Pr 28:28).

King Lemuel's mother made him memorise her sayings that would save his life, ensure his throne and keep him from assassination, a common ancient Near East occurrence. She told him to avoid wine and beer. Kings who linger over wine forget what the laws decree (Pr 31:4–5). Indeed, kings must search for justice. Kings must defend their subjects, especially those without a voice. They must advocate for the rights of the destitute and defend the rights of the poor and needy (Pr 31:8–9).

■ Drunkard

He is well-known. Drunkard, a character in my play, *Life's Choices: A Play Based on Eight Characters in Proverbs* (Branch 2016:8–25), progressively degenerates. He becomes unkempt, dishevelled. He slouches, burps and scratches himself. As he shuffles within crowds, he exudes a distinct body odour. No wonder people avoid him! He wears stained, smelly clothes. The sages vividly imagine the trouble excessive drinking causes (Pr 23:29–35) (Ross 1991:5:918).

Often part of today's homeless crowd, Drunkard sprawls on a sidewalk, legs askew. He props himself against a building's wall, at a corner where dogs mark. He sleeps openly, seemingly uncaring that he drools and others hear his snores. Sometimes he rises, waving a bottle, and staggers. When he talks to people, he speaks too loudly and gets too close. Folk back away because he has invaded their space with his alcoholic breath (Branch 2016:10).

Drunkard's choices – his path – lead to death. As Brueggemann (2003:312) remarks, 'Things simply work this way'. In Proverbs the word *path* 'refers to one's life' (Longman 2008:549).

Rabbinic thought adds that 'wherever there is wine, there is unchastity' (Pr 31:4–5) (Montefiore & Loewe 1974:1482).

■ Gossip

Proverbs describes another character pattern, the Gossip (Branch 2016:11). Gossip is portrayed as a woman, a hint that gossiping may attract that gender.

Gossip is a busybody, a meddler. She delights in any news that portrays another badly. She revels in indiscretions, never bothering to verify what she hears. Indeed, she repeats them, thus estranging close friends (Pr 17:9). Gossip relishes another's downfall and uses adverse information to advance herself.

Gossip can be a wealthy Johannesburg hostess or a waitress; a prostitute or a child. Her language, tone and point of view are dangerous, destructive and determined. Using her contacts to gain social standing, Gossip feigns friendship. She fails to follow the biblical maxim, love covers (Pr 10:12; Jas 5:20).

Gossip fuels strife (Ross 1991:5:1092). Without wood, a fire stops (Pr 26:20). Similarly, in life's events, without a tattletale, a quarrel wanes.

◼ Sluggard

The father or teacher sketches another undesirable lifestyle, that of laziness. The character studied is the Sluggard (Branch 2016:10–11). Depicted as a male, the poetic portrait hints that sloth is more likely found in men. Following Sluggard's pattern leads to failure in life.

As described throughout Proverbs, sloppy, slow Sluggard lacks redeeming qualities. He earns and merits his poor reputation. He makes excuses for not working (Ross 1991:5:1064). Known as unreliable, Sluggard is like vinegar to a sore tooth and smoke to the eyes of the one who (mistakenly and erroneously!) sends him on an errand (Pr 10:26).

Sluggard's bedrock attitude is simple: Avoid work. This mindset inevitably brings a consequence, poverty (Pr 10:4a). Throughout the Bible, the work of the hands is how one earns a living. From the time of the existence of the Garden of Eden, work is God-ordained, honourable; it is both blessed and a blessing. Moses asked the Lord: 'Establish the work of our hands for us' (Ps 90:17). As Sluggard has no work to show the Lord and others, the Lord cannot bless it; neither can people acclaim or buy it.

The consequences of Sluggard's choices ripple through his life and society. A proverb vignette indicates he owns land yet refuses to plough it. The result? During harvest, he has nothing (Pr 20:4). He refuses to build on his natural gifts or on his inheritance. His self-centred lifestyle and selfish choices undermine society's life. However, Sluggard's self-opinion validates his choices. In his own eyes, he is wiser than seven men (Pr 26:16).

Rabbinic thought emphasises that Sluggard, Drunkard, Gossip, Lady Folly and others of their ilk have no excuse. Why? Because there are three crowns: Kingdom, Priesthood and Torah. And 'the crown of the Torah is available to all' (Pr 8:15, 16) but a person must qualify as worthy (Montefiore & Loewe 1974:346).

◼ Proverbs' women

Sexual temptation in life is real. Proverbs addresses it. The father teaches about sexual temptation from one called the foreign woman. She does not necessarily come from a neighbouring country, although she may (Kidner 1985:20). What makes her (by her various names) a seductress, adulteress,

foreign woman or strange woman is the following fact: She has chosen to take herself out the covenant community's boundaries; she operates outside its norms and does not ally herself with the fear of the Lord (Kidner 1985:20). This woman 'commits treason' against her husband (Pr 2:17) (Fontaine 1992:147).

She has no scruples, but if the young man (the son?) goes after her, 'her victim has no excuse' (Kidner 1985:21). The real issue is not his inexperience but his decision to choose wrongly. 'He is unprincipled' (Kidner 1985:21).

Similar to the hunted and the hunter, the youth and strange woman use each other. There is no romance between them. 'Their unchastity is seen for what it is, stripped of its romantic colouring and traced to its bitter end' (Kidner 1985:21).

The young man loses character with each assignation. His reputation is forever tied to the relationship. If a husband is involved, no bribe or payment can appease him (Pr 6:34). The Bible abhors adultery (Ex 20:14). Husbands were encouraged – strongly so – to be faithful to their wives (Pr 5:15–20) 'but were guilty of adultery only when they consorted with married women (Lv 18:20)' (Yamauchi 2016:1:18).

When reading Proverbs about these women, Milne (2002) cautions that the irony of the biblical vision is:

> [/]t turns reality upside down. In the real world it is men who use their sexuality to rape and terrorize women. In the real world it is the daughter who must fear the sexual abuse of the father. In the real world it is a husband who is more likely to harm his wife. (p. 69)

The father gives straight talk to his son: Choose your mate wisely; live with her faithfully. Enjoy her charms; delight in her body; learn the depth of a love that matures (Pr 5:18–19).

■ Fools

The word *fool* and its cognates – *folly* and *foolishness* – represent a major theme in Proverbs and are mentioned more than 200 times.

Proverbs throws the gauntlet immediately: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but *fools despise wisdom and discipline*' (Pr 1:7; [*author's added emphasis*]). Proverbs defines a fool as one who hates correction and knowledge of any kind (Pr 12:11). A fool is one who is prone to quarrel and known to pick a fight and enjoy it (Pr 20:3) (Ross 1991:5:1040).

A fool displays a short fuse; he explodes in anger (Pr 29:11). A fool relies on himself and not on God (Pr 28:26). Complacency leads to a fool's destruction (Pr 1:32). The fool never learns that life's security comes from seeking wisdom and not from self-sufficiency (Ross 1991:5:1110).

Consider these additional insights.

A fool's characteristics hinder the life of the community, its wellbeing. A fool's actions, speech and lifestyle create heaviness in a mother's heart (Pr 10:1). A fool enjoys mischief, considering it sport, and takes pleasure in evil conduct (Pr 10:23).

A fool's own self-talk leads to his destruction (Pr 10:14). Proverbs re-emphasises this point: A fool's lips prove a snare to his soul (Pr 18:7).

Crenshaw (1981:81) notes the nuances of the English word *fool* in Hebrew scriptures:

1. *pethi* – the naïve, untutored individual
2. *kesil* – one who is innately stupid
3. *ewil* – a person characterised by obstinacy
4. *sakal* – one who persists in folly
5. *ba ar* – a crude individual
6. *nabal* – a brutal, depraved person
7. *holel* – an irrational madman
8. *les* – a foolish talker who values his opinions overmuch.

Mockers, fools and the wicked do not take rebuke well; this trio energetically turns on the one rebuking them (Pr 9:6–8). In contrast, a righteous man ponders a rebuke and eventually sees that it adds to his learning (Pr 9:9).

The fool talks too much about himself and listens poorly (Pr 18:13), a common failing that shows a lack of understanding (Lucas 2003:100). If a righteous person goes to court against a fool, a fool rages and the righteous person has no rest (Pr 29:9).

Inevitably, family traits perpetuate. Proverbs invites us to imagine this home from the perspective of this father: The foolish son brings calamity, and the contentious wife complains unabatingly like a continual drip (Pr 19:13).

The best advice for dealing with a fool is to leave his presence (Pr 14:7). Avoid fools. Let the Lord shame them (Pr 3:35).

■ Lady Folly

In my play, *Life's Choices: A Play Based on Eight Characters in Proverbs,* Lady Folly serves as a foil to Lady Wisdom (Branch 2016:10). Proverbs personifies both women (Fontaine 1992:147). As an allegorical character, Lady Folly's other names seem to include foolish woman, adulteress, seductress, strange woman and foreign woman.

As a character, some find Lady Folly more interesting than Lady Wisdom. She is brash, brassy, bossy; seductive, secretive, sensual, seditious. In colloquial wisdom, she glitters but is not gold. Best when played with exaggeration,

Lady Folly entices and entraps. Demanding constant attention, she delights in airing her own opinions (Branch 2016:22).

Proverbs 9:13–17 vividly paints Lady Folly. She resides at the top of a hill in the town's elite district near Lady Wisdom, her nemesis. She sits at the door of her house, loudly calling to passers-by (Ross 1991:5:950). By this time in her life, she avoids disguising her behaviour. She wants sex, advertises herself as giving it and solicits simple young men (Pr 9:16).

Her loudness and wandering eyes (Pr 17:24) probably produce reactions. Some, embarrassed by her sales pitch, hurriedly walk away. Others, nodding and winking, stop and smirk.

However, age catches up with her. As wrinkles and hoar hairs appear, her invitations go to the sexually uninitiated. The father or teacher in Proverbs knows this. Her contemporaries, older men who have committed adultery already, know what she offers, where she lives and her price. As return-clients, they probably bargain for lesser fees.

One can picture her as alternatingly pouting, nagging or beguiling. She knows what works with some men (Branch 2016:24). Yes, she often succeeds.

How does a young girl become a Lady Folly? Proverbs gives clues. One is the father or teacher's plea to his son or student to bring joy to his heart by obedience. A parent longs for the child to practice the parent's life lessons (Pr 4:20). A young girl who rejects parental lessons shows she might become a Lady Folly.

Lady Wisdom

In my play, *Life's Choices: A Play Based on Eight Characters in Proverbs*, Lady Wisdom, as I call her, is 'dignified, gracious, courtly in bearing' (Branch 2016:10). She speaks loudly, invites all to her banquet to learn her ways, knows the townspeople by name and assesses them accurately (Branch 2016:10). She is delightful.

Lady Wisdom ignores patriarchy, refuses to tolerate gender bias and shows feminism (Pemberton 2018:15). She defies limitations and male restraints. She openly shows her anger and fusses at Sluggard and Drunkard, two disreputable characters known for poor choices (Branch 2016:20, 22).

One follows her movements with imagination. Scholars ponder her role. Yes, she is a powerful prophet (Pemberton 2018:15). Like them she cries out, 'How long?' (Pr 1:22; Hab 1:2; Ps 13:1–2). As a child, she was present alongside the Lord and active in creation (Pr 8:22–31) (Lucas 2003:107).

Some sages consider her the Spouse of God (Urbach 1979:65). Other sages claim some sense of divine birth for her but only as a vivid, literary way of

expressing the close relationship between wisdom and the Lord (Pemberton 2018:16). Mystery surrounds her.

Lady Wisdom offers a path to walk in life rather than a destination. She presents a difficult, strenuous life. Yet choosing anything less is folly and leads to death (Pemberton 2018:14).

Boldly, Lady Wisdom calls out in the marketplace (Branch 2016:13). Frank Mason North (2001) captures that moment in these lines:

Where cross the crowded ways of life
Where sound the cries of race and clan,
Above the noise of selfish strife
We hear your voice, O Son of Man! (p. 591)

■ Wicked and wickedness

The concepts of wickedness and Wicked, a strong, distinct character, occur more than 100 times in Proverbs. They present a major theme. Proverbs emphasises that righteousness leads to life and wickedness to death (Pr 11:19).

The father or teacher portrays Wicked as lacking good traits. Contrary to modern psychology, Wicked has only negative characteristics. Modern determining factors like a violent home, single mother, absent father and hunger are missing. Wicked purposes wickedness in his heart and lives wickedly. Wicked meets an early, sudden death (Pr 1:19; 3:25).

Perverse speech and devious ways mark Wicked (Pr 2:12–15). His walk reflects his talk, for he prefers dark, crooked paths. He actually rejoices in 'the perverseness of evil' (Pr 2:14)! Proverbs takes readers through Wicked's meanderings via poetic couplets. Not only does Wicked accomplish evil deeds, but he also finds that his own sins ensnare him (Pr 5:22). His choices weave cords that bind him and permit no escape. Consequences pile up. Ruin – self-inflicted – overtakes him.

The father or teacher commands the son or student not to set foot on Wicked's path or walk in a way frequented by evil men (Pr 4:14). A hallmark of the way of the wicked is a darkness so deep and thick that when they stumble, they do not know what made them trip (Pr 4:19).

Numeric verses outline seven character traits the Lord detests (Pr 6:16–19): Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that rush to do evil, a false witness and a man who stirs up dissension.

Throughout the Bible, character is determined by actions and spoken words and not by interior thoughts. Proverbs 12 provides some ways to spot the wicked via words and actions:

- Their plans are deceitful. (v. 5)
- Their end is absolute. When overthrown, they are no more. (v. 7)
- Their kindest acts rise only to the level of cruelty. (v. 10)
- Life brings the wicked much trouble. (v. 21)
- A lack of caution in the wicked (for instance in the choice of friends) leads them astray. (v. 26)

Rabbinic thought notes that a major difference between the wise and others appears in handling correction. A wise person loves correction for he learns from it, but one who hates correction is stupid (Pr 12:1) (Montefiore & Loewe 1974:1534).

☐ The Lord detests the wicked's actions

One of the saddest parts of studying Proverbs is to see this fact emphasised: The Lord not only detests the sacrifice of the wicked but also their way and prayers (Pr 15:8–9). The Lord works against the wicked because the wicked have made the Lord their enemy. 'The Righteous One takes note of the house of the wicked and brings the wicked to ruin' (Pr 21:12).

Consider these scriptures:

- The Lord detests the choices of the wicked but loves those who pursue righteousness. (Pr 15:9)
- The Lord detests the thoughts of the wicked, but those of the pure are pleasing to him. (Pr 15:26)
- The Lord tears down the proud man's house but he keeps the widow's boundaries intact. (Pr 15:25)
- The Lord stays aloof from the wicked; he will not act on their cries; but he hears the prayer of the righteous. (Pr 15:29)
- The Lord works all situations in life for his own ends and purposes – even the day of disaster for the wicked. (Pr 16:4)

Truly, the wicked have a sorry end. Disaster will overtake both the scoundrel and villain; it will come upon such individuals suddenly; it brings a destruction without remedy (Pr 6:15).

The beloved hymn 'We Gather Together' (Baker 2001) agrees:

> The wicked oppressing now cease from distressing,
> sing praises to His name: He forgets not His own. (p. 81)

☐ Hope for Wicked and for the wicked

The character Wicked, however, is not beyond help or hope in Scripture. Consider this story: As Jesus and the two thieves die together on their crosses, one thief glimpsed eternal life. That thief had previously reviled Jesus, taunting him to save himself and them (Mt 27:38, 44; Mk 15:27, 33).

But that thief changed. Perhaps the change came from observing how Jesus experienced dying. Patterns of life carry over to how one dies.

That thief rebuked his fellow thief saying (Lk 23):

> [D]on't you fear God since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong. (vv. 39–41)

The exchange among the three probably took much energy. They probably conversed slowly and agonisingly; crucifixion kills by suffocation.

That thief turned to Jesus and continued, probably in short gasps, 'Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom'. Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise' (Lk 23:42–43).

The interaction of the changed thief with Jesus gives hope to others. That thief broke the pattern of wickedness.

■ Special references to the concepts of life and theology in Proverbs

■ Fear of the Lord

The fear of the Lord, a phrase in the prologue of Proverbs (1:7), sets the book's theme; it occurs 14 times (Bowling 1980:401). The fear of the Lord is the fountain of life (Pr 14:27), and prolongs both days and life (Pr 10:27; 19:23). It enables one to hate evil (Pr 8:13). Longman (2008:549) defines fear in Proverbs as 'knee-knocking awe', a rendition sure to bring a smile.

Mentioned early in Israel's history in connection with the Exodus (Ex 12:10, 31; 20:18–20), fearing the Lord came to mean having a loyalty toward, a love for and an obedience of the Lord's commandments (Lucas 2003:110).

A way to express the fear of the Lord is by being kind to strangers, the fatherless and widows (Dt 10:18–20). The fear of the Lord enables one to depart from evil (Pr 16:6). It is tied to courageous living, as in the case of the Hebrew midwives (Ex 1:17, 21). The fear of the Lord is learned in a community setting by reading the law and by listening (Dt 31:11).

The fear of the Lord in Proverbs catches a wonderment that enjoys the stars at night, the dew in the morning and the busyness of ants (Pr 6:6–11). The person practicing this fear observes, listens and ponders. When this person speaks, others listen.

Brensinger (1997:2:112) comments that truly, 'life in Proverbs is more than good, old-fashioned common sense. Indeed, fearing the Lord leads to life' (Pr 19:23).

■ Creation, ethics and wonder

What Israel's sages did – with much analytical thinking – was observe God's creation, observe human behaviour and provide the people with general expectations 'grounded in experience' (Perdue 2000:33). The concept, the fear of the Lord (Pr 1:7), undergirds their findings.

The sages could have written for profit, glory and international renown. Instead, they produced a book that teaches ethical behaviour and pinpoints non-ethical conduct. Their teaching method contains exaggeration and hyperbole, terse couplets and short vignettes. Instead of seeking a profit, they made their teaching affordable and available. It became standard teaching in Israel.

An unexpected offshoot is that the sages became the life-coaches of millennia. Proverbs gives clear-cut patterns outlining ways to fail or be successful in life. If you want the benefits of a successful life, then follow the procedure, advises modern-day life coach Clarice Fluitt (2020).

The fear of the Lord also brings at least two acknowledgements: Firstly, a growing respect of the Lord throughout one's life. Secondly, a recognition of one's smallness in the universe. The sages saw creation itself and their action of observing creation as ways to know the character of God; knowledge of creation did not differ from knowledge of God (Perdue 2000:37).

William Cowper (1955) catches the reverence of fear and links it to the treasures of wisdom as follows:

> God moves in a mysterious way
> His wonders to perform.
> He plants his footsteps in the sea
> And rides upon the storm.
>
> Deep in unfathomable mines
> Of never-failing skill
> He treasures up His bright designs,
> And works His sovereign will. (p. 112)

■ Major references to life in Proverbs

Proverbs gives guidelines on proper actions in many life situations including the following.

■ Avoid self-righteousness

The sages knew the human tendency toward self-righteousness. Consequently, 'Watch yourself! Catch that trait immediately!' they admonished.

Here's an imagined incident. Do not gloat when your enemy falls; do not let your heart rejoice. Why? Because the Lord sees, disapproves of your attitude and may turn his wrath away from the enemy (Pr 24:17–18). Furthermore, such rejoicing dishonours the Lord (Ross 1991:5:1076).

◼ Be courageous

Studying wisdom (no matter when it begins in life) should produce knowledge of the Lord's character. Ideally, the Lord's character slowly changes a person's bad habits to righteous patterns.

Ingrained wisdom can then produce split-second results for this imagined incident. You suddenly see someone being hauled to his death. Proverbs 24:11–12 tells you what to do. Take immediate action! Seek to rescue that person! Perhaps that person is innocent and unjustly condemned. Do not hide behind the attitude, 'I know nothing!' Why not? Because you then display your life and attitude before the Lord. The Lord holds you responsible (Ross 1991:5:1074–1075). The Lord guards your life, weighs hearts and repays each person – including you! – according to actions (Pr 24:11–12).

◼ With a king, mind your manners!

Proverbs even gives a quick lesson on how to act at a royal court. If you are invited, do not push yourself forward for you may be humiliated publicly and told to stand aside. Instead, wait for the king's summons (Pr 25:8–10). Keep your eyes on the king. Sit when he says to sit. Eat sparingly. A king knows the cost of a banquet and will watch if you have a big appetite. Yes, the king prides his cooks' delicacies – but do not ask for seconds (Pr 23:1–3)!

◼ When encountering anger...

The Bible overwhelmingly presents man's anger negatively and God's anger as rare, specifically targeted and short-lived (Ex 34:6–7). Man's anger usually leads to interconnecting problems (Powlison 2016:14).

Proverbs considers specific examples and consequences of human anger. An angry man stirs up dissension and a hot-tempered one commits many sins (Pr 29:22). Wise men turn away anger (Pr 29:8). Proverbs links speech and anger as follows: One with a sly tongue garners angry looks (Pr 25:23).

An angry king roars like a lion and resembles a messenger of death but a wise man learns how to appease his anger (Pr 19:12; 16:14). Yes, anger management can be learned; yes, it is possible to handle anger in life in good ways (Powlison 2016:2).

■ Handling fools

Under the category of how to live around fools, Proverbs suggests honing one's answers. A one-size-for-all reply does not fit all questions. Proverbs 26:4–5 first gives silence as a response to a fool's folly and second, suggests answering a fool in the fool's tone and manner. Wise discernment makes the judgement call. In a similar way, Galatians 6:2 calls on all members of the congregation to carry each other's burdens and then Verse 5 says that each man should carry his own load. Again, wisdom makes that judgement call.

■ Learn wisdom via numerical proverbs

Imagination takes place in the numerical sayings of Proverbs 30; descriptions of ordinary occurrences converge around a concept and a set number. For example, the sage Agur notes that there are four things in life that are never satisfied: The grave, a barren womb, a land thirsty for water and fire (Pr 30:15b–16). His words paint imaginative pictures.

On a happier note, Agur mentions four things in life too wonderful for him: The way of an eagle in the sky, a snake on a rock, a ship at sea, 'and a man with a maiden' (Pr 30:18–19).

The genius of Agur here and other Proverbs' sages was that they observed daily life and gave it import. They saw patterns and pondered how the cosmos reflected them. They allowed themselves to wonder. Their wonder led to worship.

■ Nuances of life in 'better than' Proverbs

Proverbs describes degrees of life by using the words *better than.* These comparisons give further insights on good and bad ways to live.

It is *better* to have a little and with it the fear of the Lord *than* to have great wealth and live in turmoil (Pr 15:16). Similarly, it is *better* to have a simple dinner with herbs *than* to dine sumptuously and experience hatred (Pr 15:17). Modern Jewish thought links Verse 17 with the simplicity, harmony and love in the Garden of Eden (Brumberg-Kraus 2014:47).

Many *better than* passages show a respect for the ordinary, a value placed on simplicity; they reveal a yearning of the Jews as they remembered these things: the first Sabbath, their honeymoon with the Lord in the wilderness, their first Passover and the days of King Solomon (Brumberg-Kraus 2014:56).

The one who finds wisdom finds gifts beyond his dreams. Wisdom gives profits *better than* silver (Pr 3:14). Wisdom is *more precious than* rubies; indeed, nothing one desires can compare with her (Pr 8:11). Indeed, it is *better* to get wisdom *than* to get gold (Pr 16:16).

The *better than* proverbs stress peace of mind. For instance, it is *better* to have a little and righteousness *than* a lot without justice (Pr 16:8). It is *better* to have a dry morsel with quietness *than* to be in a house of feasting and experience strife (Pr 17:1). Someone who is poor and yet walking in integrity is *better than* someone who speaks perversely and is a fool (Pr 19:1).

Proverbs teaches that self-discipline ranks highly in life and generally leads to success. The one slow to anger is *better than* those considered mighty, and the one ruling his spirit is *better than* he who conquers a city (Pr 16:32).

Truly, the righteous have come to expect to see and to experience God's goodness as a routine part of their lives (Hagee 2015).

◼ Proverbs repeatedly juxtaposes life and death

The righteous man attains life, but the one who pursues evil goes to his death (Pr 11:19). The righteous are on the path that leads to life and immortality (Pr 12:28). A way to guard your life is to guard your lips (Pr 13:3).

Wisdom's learners later become wisdom's teachers. Their paths become the fruit of life; they turn others from paths that lead to death (Pr 13:14). Psalm 145:4 links this concept to the Lord by declaring that 'one generation will commend your works to another and tell of your mighty acts'.

The righteous are on an upward path of life. And this upward path keeps them from going down to the grave (Pr 15:24). Notice the word *down*, an adverb often associated with something negative. For example, Isaiah tells the Israelites, 'Woe to those who go *down* to Egypt' (Is 31:1; [*author's added emphasis*]). Jesus tells a parable about a man who went on a journey, *down* to Jericho, and was beset by robbers (Lk 10:25–37).

Rabbinic thought commends the righteous for their contributions to the lives of the community. 'Beauty and power and wisdom and wealth and old age and glory and honour and sons are good for the righteous and good for the whole world' (Pr 16:31; 17:6; 20:29; Is 24:23) (Montefiore & Loewe 1974:1511).

☐ Tree of life

The tree of life is a multi-faceted and always positive concept in Proverbs.

Proverbs provides no specifics on its description. Is it real or merely allegorical? Is it like the tree growing by the watercourse in Psalm 1 or the one in Revelation 22:14? It could be the tree in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 2:9. That tree gave mortals eternal life, 'probably by preventing them from aging' (Carvalho 2010:392).

Consider these additional insights: Lady Wisdom calls herself a tree of life, probably the source of life to those who embrace her ways (Pr 3:18).

A righteous person produces fruit, a tree of life. Furthermore, the righteous become teachers and display a lifestyle attractive to others. They win souls and are wise (Pr 11:30).

Naturally, the tongue relates to this concept. The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life (Pr 15:4a). With that positive view, one can expect that the opposite is bad. It is. 'A deceitful tongue crushes the spirit' (Pr 15:4b).

The tree of life offers and represents encouragement: 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life' (Pr 13:12).

Philosopher and theologian Henri Nouwen (2015:12), known for his spirituality of the heart, observes that while we wait and 'in the middle of our longings, we discover the footprints of the one who has created them'. Put another way, we see the Lord's hand and guidance of our lives. He waits to give us the best.

☐ Life or death in the tongue

Proverbs emphasises that the tongue (alternately called *speech, mouth* or *words*) sets life's course. One's words hold this mighty power: Life and death (Pr 18:21; Jas 3:9–10). Jesus knew the importance of words, saying that on judgement day, a man will have to give account of every careless word he has spoken. 'For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned' (Mt 12:36–37).

From Genesis 1 onwards, words create. God set the example: He spoke all parts of creation into existence.

The father or teacher knows that the son or student needs to be trained to speak Lady Wisdom's words throughout his life; he must memorise them. The contrast between those who speak her sayings and those who do not shows divergent paths: 'The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked' (Pr 10:11). Words lead to life or to violence and/or death.

With versatility, the father or teacher puts the concept another way: 'He who guards his lips, guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin' (Pr 13:3).

The sages note these guidelines regarding words and life (Lucas 2003:99–100):

- The prudent one holds his tongue. (Pr 10:19)
- A person of hasty speech, well, there is more hope for a fool! (Pr 29:20)
- One who gives an answer before hearing – well, that shows folly and shame! (Pr 18:13)

A general characteristic for personal safety throughout life is this: The person who guards his speech, guards himself against calamity (Pr 21:23).

Proverbs also considers the wicked's speech. Yes, a lying tongue can make a fortune, but this fortune is both a fleeting vapour and a deadly snare (Pr 21:6). Ultimately, God brings judgement on this long-term behaviour. Truly, a wicked person listens to lying lips; indeed, a liar gives much attention to a malicious tongue (Pr 17:4).

☐ Lady Wisdom's self-declarations on life and learning wisdom

While fools display destructive chatter (Pr 10:8,10, 14), Lady Wisdom audaciously claims, 'Whoever finds me, finds life' (Pr 8:35)! That is either a true statement – or she is a poached egg, to loosely quote C.S. Lewis (1980:52).

Yet studying her statement and character portrait show her as confident, fully cognisant and courageous. She teaches wisdom to men and women alike, as is evidenced in the closing poem about a valiant woman and remarkable home (Pr 31:10–31). Passages portray her as a sensible, articulate figure who urgently wants people to learn her ways and live (Pr 8:1–31). Clearly not a lunatic or poached egg, Lady Wisdom recommends lifelong learning and ongoing instruction (Pr 9:11).

Rabbinic thought notes that merely associating with the wise has benefits (Pr 13:20) (Montefiore & Loewe 1974):

> [/]t is like a man who goes into a scent shop; even if he does not buy anything, the sweet smell clings to his clothes, and does not depart all day. (p. 1368)

■ Poverty

Proverbs mentions poverty, an economic life experience for multitudes, most often in connection with slackness and personal moral failures (Pr 6:6–7; 23:21). Here are additional canonical insights regarding the origins of poverty in life (Keller 2010:33):

- Oppression, including a judicial system favouring the powerful. (Lv 19:15)
- Loans with excessive interest. (Ex 22:25–27)
- Unjustly low wages. (Jer 22:13; Jas 5:1–6)
- Calamities like famine, earthquake, locusts, war. (Mt 24:7; 1 Ki 18:2; Jl 2:25, Jr 24:10)
- Extremes of wealth and poverty in society. (Amos 5:11–12; Ezk 22:29; Mi 2:2; Is 5:8)

Although Proverbs stresses a slow, steady diligence that accumulates wealth, it also acknowledges that some people are poor and honourable. One of the 'better than' proverbs has this poignant observation: '*Better* a poor man whose walk is blameless *than* a rich man whose ways are perverse' (Pr 28:6).

Throughout Proverbs, the rich receive warnings like this: The one who charges unfair, high interest is only amassing his wealth for another who will distribute it to the poor (Pr 28:8).

Rich and poor share these absolutes: For both, the Lord is their Maker and the lives of both end in death (Pr 22:2).

Yes, hard work generally leads to economic prosperity (Pr 12:11; 14:23; 20:13). Yet there are exceptions – life's curve balls: A poor man's field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away (Pr 13:23).

The noble woman of Proverbs 31 makes giving a lifestyle. She 'opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy' (Pr 31:20). The verbs indicate her attitude that makes each encounter dignified and welcoming.

Similarly, Proverbs commends a generous man because he shares his food with the poor (Pr 22:9). However, while the Bible demands that we share our resources with the needy, and that failing to do so is unjust, it does not precisely say how that redistribution should be carried out (Keller 2010:32).

■ Proverbs 31:10–31: Life in a noble home observed

The Introduction mentioned three inclusions and cited two: The king (Pr 1:1; 31:1) and the fear of the Lord (Pr 1:7; 31:30). The third inclusion is the father and mother (Pr 1:8; 31:10–31).

The home life portrayed in the instruction of the father and mother (Pr 1:8–9:18) is happy, disciplined, stable, active and centred on the fear of the Lord. The home life presented in the book's concluding acrostic poem describes the happy home of another family, possibly the grown son. Proverbs begins and ends with glimpses of two homes.

Proverbs 31:10–31 presents a successful working marriage in which both partners excel. The 22-verse poem is much more than what it is commonly called, an Ode to a Noble Wife (Branch 2012:1–9). Spanning many years, the portrait seems to have been written from the point of view of an observer of that marriage, perhaps a close friend (Branch 2012:4). Penned in the dramatic point of view, the poem gives the words and actions of those it portrays (Lostracco & Wilkerson 2008:28).

Yes, the poem extols a truly remarkable woman. However, the husband's references likewise show him as exemplary.

The beautifully constructed poem is not only acrostic but also chiastic. A chiastic structure pairs A, A' (vv. 10, 31), B, B' (vv. 11, 30), etc. Remember this: The original audience was an oral culture, one that listened rather than read.

Verse 23, the husband's verse, is the only one not paired; it stands alone (Garrett 1993:248). Because of the chiastic structure and singleness of Verse 23, the husband and wife have equal weight (Branch 2012:3).

Presumably the son or student has learned Lady Wisdom's principles. The book's concluding poem shows him how to select a good wife. First, look at character. How does this prospective young woman treat others? What are her attitudes toward work, the poor? How does she communicate with others? Does her character so far indicate her faithfulness as a mate?

The poem never mentions today's ways of choosing a wife: good looks, lots of money and proven sexual expertise.

Perhaps the wife, as a young bride, resolved immediately to do her husband good and not harm each day of her life (Pr 31:12). She has done that. Perhaps the young husband decided to express his full confidence in her and praise her (vv. 11, 28). He has done that.

The poem chronicles this marriage over decades. The woman's activities – running an expanding household, organising servants, cooking multiple meals, tailoring, weaving, raising children, investing in a vineyard – are accomplishments over many years.

As life partners, both enjoy work, but their 'works' are different. The woman rolls up her sleeves and the husband sits at the city gate.

Their marriage reflects the principles Proverbs teaches. Each wants the other to succeed. The husband gradually becomes recognised as a leader in the land (v. 23). Evidently, the wife has such a good reputation that she is invited to join her husband at the city gate (v. 31).

The two use words wisely. He constantly praises her; she thinks before she speaks. They acknowledge the talents of the other and affirm the other's giftings (Branch 2012:6). Each trusts the other. She can select land for a vineyard; he can learn leadership at the city gate. Their individual efforts promote the family unit. They follow Proverbs' principles. Their community recognises their successful union.

Each respects the other's judgement. The wife has the ability to make money and the husband appreciates her sound business sense (Branch 2012:7) The wife may be financially independent. The wife and husband are at ease with each other. Consider the following (Branch 2012):

> The couple has achieved what seems so commonplace but is so rare: an understanding of each other. This husband and wife are so busy enjoying their fulfilling, productive lives that they do not have the time to engage in adultery, laziness, drunkenness, nagging, or gossiping, other lifestyles presented in Proverbs. (p. 8)

The acrostic poem (Pr 31:10–31) stresses the equal balance in the home that begins Proverbs (Pr 1:8). The chapters between show how to become a good partner in a marriage and how to stay married. Character matters.

Undoubtedly, each partner in the Proverbs 31 team was taught as a child the importance of finding the right mate and then upon marriage of being that right mate. Yes, quite likely those who follow Proverbs' teachings will have wealth and leave their children the legacy of a good name (Pr 22:1a).

However, the poem's placement at the end of Proverbs suggests that the highest personal satisfaction in life is this: A good marriage and a happy home.

Perhaps Henry Ware, Jr., and Bryan Jeffery Leech (2001) thought of Proverbs and their own marriages when they penned and revised this hymn, 'Happy the Home When God is There':

> Happy the home where God's strong love is starting to appear
> Where all the children hear his fame and parents hold him dear.

> Happy the home where prayer is heard, and praise is everywhere
> Where parents love the scared Word and its true wisdom share. (p. 607)

■ Conclusion

Proverbs' concluding poem highlights specific principles of Wisdom Literature: Wise use of the tongue, honest labour, fair provision for workers, care of the poor, living an ordered life and living in fear of the Lord. The poem shows successful lives in action, a Proverbs' principle (Branch 2012:2).

The poem also shows another principle, namely, that wisdom is a skill that is both taught and can be learned. Proverbs affirms that those who pursue righteousness and love find life, prosperity and honour (Pr 21:21).

Proverbs presents the lives of individuals and groups; parents and children; kings and commoners. Chapters 1–9 introduce life patterns like wickedness, folly and wisdom and personify them. Chapters 10–31 portray imaginative vignettes of daily life, common interactions throughout a community in both the domains of the wealthy and the hovels of the poor.

Although the poem ends happily about a righteous couple, the book contains numerous admonitions against wickedness. In both book sections, Proverbs contrasts the wicked and the righteous. Consider these insights from Proverbs 10:

- On body parts. While blessings crown the head of the righteous, violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked. (v. 6)
- On smells. At death, a righteous man is remembered with blessings, but at death, the name of the wicked rots. (v. 7)
- On finances. The wages of the righteous provide them life, but the income of the wicked brings them punishment. (v. 16)

Although full of articulate observations, Proverbs veers from an absolute, divine pre-determination of all parts of a person's life. As Genesis upsets the applecart of the theology of primogeniture (the right of the firstborn to the

major portion of the family's wealth), so Proverbs likewise broadly covers life's curve balls. Proverbs gives God wiggle room. Brueggemann (2003:312) elegantly calls this the Lord's 'inscrutable freedom'.

Proverbs stresses that the Lord keenly observes all activity of life in the marketplace. Yes, we can choose life patterns of folly and foolishness. However, God reserves the last word.

In the following examples, the word *man* means both *man* and *woman*:

- A man may plan his life but the Lord determines his steps. (Pr 16:9)
- The heart of a man has many plans but the Lord's purpose prevails. (Pr 19:21)
- Although a man's ways may seem right to him, the Lord weighs the heart. (Pr 21:2)
- The Lord orders a man's steps. How can anybody understand his own way? (Pr 29:24)
- No wisdom, insight or plan can succeed against the Lord. (Pr 21:30)
- A horse is trained for battle but victory rests with the Lord. (Pr 21:31)

William Williams (2001:501) acknowledged humanity's need for God's watch-care. Perhaps while remembering Proverbs, he (Williams 2001) penned these lines:

> Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
> pilgrim through this barren land.
> I am weak, but thou art mighty –
> hold me with thy powerful hand.
> Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
> be thou still my strength and shield;
> be thou still my strength and shield. (p. 501)

Although the presence of the Lord permeates Proverbs, the book also stresses personal responsibility. Proverbs presents choices and states consequences.

Put another way, the sages did not believe that a deed produced only one automatic outcome in life. They gave validity to both divine and human freedom (Perdue 2000:38). The Lord alone determines if an action will be blessed or punished. Proverbs serves as a guide.

Proverbs gives space for wonder, awe and mystery while acknowledging that God is beyond our human ken, knowledge and understanding. After all, the Lord asked Job, 'Where were you when [...] the earth's footings were set [...] and the morning stars sang together?' (Job 38:4, 6–7).

Similarly, the Lord graciously invited Israel to obey his voice and follow his commandments (Ex 19:5). The Lord Jesus said that those who hear his words and do them will be likened to a wise man who built his house on a rock (Mt 7:24). Likewise, Lady Wisdom's invitation to come to her banquet, learn her ways and become wise resounds today (Pr 9:1–12).

Life in the Scrolls: Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther

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■ Introduction

The extant wordings of the five *Megilloth* in the *Ketubim* section of the Hebrew Bible corpus, the books of Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Esther, reflect a wide range of ideas and beliefs that circulated and co-existed into the period of early Judaism, from where we have the earliest exemplars of these writings. The themes pertaining to life that form part of the subject matter transmitted by these books are no exception. In this chapter, I take a closer look at the concept of life through the lens of larger themes of the Five Scrolls. I do not attempt to do justice to all the complexities in language, literary features and cultural influences exhibited by the textual representatives of the books or provide a detailed discussion of their impact on how the available wordings of the books express the concept of life. My aim in the chapter is only to give a general impression of the concept in the *Megilloth*. I discuss the five books in turn. In each case, I begin the discussion with a very brief overview of the theme

of life in the book. I do not list or summarise all the references to words and phrases involving life in the book, but rather focus on a selection of passages where the concept of life features in the larger themes of the book.[99] The comments are based on readings of the passages that draw on textual, linguistic, literary and cultural information.[100] The discussion closes with a few summary remarks on the theme of life from a theological perspective. After discussing all five books in this way, I conclude the chapter with suggestions for further research.

■ The concept of life in the Five Scrolls
■ Ruth

The characters, scenes and episodes in the short story of Ruth show a concern with the provision and protection of life, especially the care for people who are dependent on and in need of the kindness of others (including the loyalty of kinspersons), as well as the transgenerational continuation of life.

In the story's opening chapter, whose beginning and end refer to famine (Rt 1:1) and fertility (Rt 1:22), that is, a threat to life and a proof of life, Naomi's situation is the inverse of conditions in Judah. When the land suffers hunger and want, Naomi has a husband and two sons who take care of her; when Naomi's male protectors die and there is no one to care for her, Judah receives food from YHWH. In other words, when YHWH improves the fortunes of the land, he brings calamity over Naomi (Rt 1:20–21). Naomi returns to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest (Rt 1:22). She wants Ruth and Orpah, her Moabite daughters-in-law, to leave her to her fate, but Ruth refuses (Rt 1):

> Do not press me to abandon you, to turn back from following you,
> for where you travel, I will travel, and wherever you stay, I will stay,[101]
> your people are my people, and your God is my God,
> wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.
> Thus and more may YHWH do to me,
> [*I swear*] that only death will separate me from you. (vv. 16–17)

Ruth's determination to accompany Naomi in this life and the next speaks to her singular loyalty. This loyalty and the setting of the story against the backdrop of the barley harvest play important parts in the restoration of Naomi's life. The harvest is a symbol of YHWH as a life-giving God. He has seen to the needs of his people and provided them with food (Rt 1:6).[102] The

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99. The selection of passages and the interpretive comments are not exhaustive, but are provided for illustrative purposes only.

100. Unless indicated otherwise, the translations of passages from the *Megilloth* are my own.

101. 'Travel' and 'stay' are opposites that create a merism referring to all of life (Bush 1996:82).

102. The word for food, *leḥem* [bread], is a play on the name Bethlehem (Sasson 1995:22; Schipper 2016:87). The place and time of Naomi's return, Bethlehem [house of bread] and the barley harvest (a precondition for bread making), are signs of prosperity and harbingers of the change in her household's fortunes.

news that YHWH has made the continuation of life in Judah possible is the catalyst for Naomi's homecoming and her return to Bethlehem with Ruth sets the rest of the events of the story in motion. These events, where Ruth demonstrates loyalty to her in-laws, especially with her body, culminate in the birth of Naomi's grandson, Obed. This is another symbol of YHWH as a life-giving God. He made Ruth conceive (Rt 4:13) and the son she brings into the world will take care of Naomi. He will be her 'restorer of life' and nourish her when she is grey-haired (Rt 4:15). This means that he will bring her out of her life-threatening situation that was caused by the deaths of her husband and two sons.[103] It also implies that Naomi will live long enough in the bosom of her family to see an advanced age.

The theme of blessing runs like a thread throughout the story and it is closely connected to the concept of life. The women's blessing of Naomi where they mention her grandson as the restorer of her life (Rt 4:14–15) is one example. Other instances include the reapers' blessing of Boaz (Rt 2:4),[104] and Naomi's blessing of Boaz (Rt 2:19–20), who makes sure that Naomi and Ruth have more than enough to eat. He thereby demonstrates his loyalty [ḥesed] not only to living (and needy) members of his extended family, but the deceased ones as well. Boaz also blesses Ruth when she asks him to marry her (Rt 3:9–10). He refers to her loyalty [ḥesed] towards her in-laws and then swears an oath to fulfil the redeemer duties. In the oath, he invokes YHWH as the living (and, per implication, life-giving) God (Rt 3:13). By asking for his hand in marriage, Ruth seeks the protection of Boaz (Rt 3:9), which imitates the protection provided for her by YHWH in lieu of her parents and native land (Rt 2:12). In both cases, the idea of protection is expressed by the image of wings:

> And Boaz replied and said to her: 'Everything that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been reported in full to me, when you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and you went to a people whom you did not know before. May YHWH repay your deed and may your reward be full from YHWH, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge'. (Rt 2:11–12)[105]

103. The expression 'restorer of life' recalls Ruth 1:21, where Naomi uses the same verb to tell the women of Bethlehem that YHWH has brought her back empty, that is, without a husband and sons to care for her life. Cf., for example, Hubbard (1988:272); Bush (1996:257); LaCocque (2004:142); Schipper (2016:179).

104. When the owner of a field is blessed by YHWH, there will be plenty to harvest, which, in turn, means that many people will be able to make a living.

105. Ruth 2:11–12. The description of YHWH with wings can be interpreted as an avian image or a solar one. Keel (1997:190, 192) suggests that the image of the wings of God 'is drawn from the bird which protectively spreads its wings over its young'. The image, however, might also have YHWH as a solar deity in view. Indeed, YHWH is associated with visual representations of winged sun disks and winged scarab beetles on royal seal impressions on the handles of storage vessels from the kingdom of Judah (Keel 2017:99, 100, fig. 48.1–48.8). These representations are divine emblems (cf. Ornan 2005:232) and the outstretched wings symbolise the protection of the deity (cf. Cornelius 2014:146–152; LeMon 2010). Cf. also footnote 135 below.

> And then, at midnight, the man woke with a start and was groped. To his surprise, a woman was lying at his genitals.[106] And he said: 'Who are you?' And she said: 'I am Ruth, your handmaiden; spread your "wing" over your handmaiden, for you are a redeemer'. (Rt 3:8–9)[107]

The parallel between the divine and human protection of Ruth is related to the idea that YHWH makes continuation of life possible through the machinations of human characters in the story whereby they show loyalty to family, especially members in need. This continuation of life is not only for individuals, such as Naomi, but also for YHWH's people. This is not only symbolised by the harvests, but also by the genealogy of David with which the story closes (Rt 4:18–22). David is here a representative of kingship and, in the ancient Near East, it was the duty of kings as representatives of gods on earth to maintain the divinely instituted order in the world that provides an environment in which life in nature and communities can flourish.[108]

The story of Naomi's family and the genealogy of David (and the implied move from the period of the Judges [an era of instability and continuous threat] to the era of the united monarchy [a period of stability and security]) is a reminder that YHWH is the life-giving God who shows loyalty and gives protection through the actions of people. In addition to the life YHWH creates in nature, he also enables human life to continue through people's deeds.

■ Song of Songs

The poems of the Song of Songs are about the erotic side of the human experience of life. They are the stuff of sex, sensuality and the ups and downs of being in love.

The poems are full of images involving human, animal and plant life. Good examples of such images appear in Song of Songs 4, where the boy waxes lyrical about the beauty of his beloved. At the climax of the encomium (Song 4:15), he calls her a garden fountain, a well of 'living water' and flowing streams from Lebanon. The 'living water' refers to fresh or running water and alludes

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106. I interpret the 'place of feet' in the Hebrew text as a euphemism for private parts. Cf. Trible (1978:198, n. 23).

107. Ruth 3:8–9. Several Hebrew manuscripts have the reading 'your wings', which makes Ruth's plea for protection very similar to the image in Ruth 2:12. The reading 'your wing', however, refers to the hem of a garment. The gesture of spreading the hem of a garment over someone indicates that a new relationship is established and that a prospective husband accepts the responsibility of supporting his future wife materially (Kruger 1984:83–84). As her husband, Boaz's protection of Ruth would entail that he cares for her and makes sure that she does not want for anything.

108. Cf. Schmid (2019:409): 'Royal ideology is a shared Near Eastern phenomenon in antiquity. It takes on different expressions, but the central convictions are comparable. The king is reckoned as God's son, though this declaration is to be understood as functional rather than biological. He receives the task of representing God on earth. He is to foster law and order. He creates cosmos and drives back chaos. He conquers the enemies. He is even responsible for the flourishing of nature, which supplies provisions for the population'.

to the beloved's perennial power to rejuvenate her lover. The image of a garden fountain also has life-giving connotations. It recalls Song of Songs 4:12, where the boy describes his 'sister bride'[109] as a locked garden and a sealed fountain.[110] These images may perhaps have to do with ideas of intimacy, the girl's sexual exclusiveness, sensuality and potential fertility (Fox 1985:137), but they definitely allude to the beloved's ability to revitalise the boy. In the thought-world of the ancient Near East, gardens have a symbolic meaning. They represent created order in nature, as well as life itself (Cornelius 1989:209, 216, 226). A garden is 'an ordered space, usually enclosed by a fence or wall and accessible only through a gate or entrance' (Cornelius 1989:205). It is heavily watered, planted with plants, flowers and trees, and houses animals, birds and fish. It can also contain an artificial hill, terraces and buildings (Cornelius 1989:205). In Egyptian visual representations of gardens, rectangular or T-shaped ponds are a central feature. Ponds did not only have a practical function as reservoirs of water, but were also symbols of Nun, the personification of the primeval ocean from which all life originated (cf., e.g. Cornelius 1989:226; Pinch 2002:172–173). Images of people partaking of the water and fruit in a garden indicate that they are imbued with new life and vitality. For example, a painting from the tomb of Tjanefer in Thebes (TT 158) (cf. Cornelius 1989:211–212, Figure 5; Steele 1959:pl. 1) shows him as a human drinking from a walled T-shaped pond, as well as a *ba*-bird hovering over the pond and receiving water and fruit from a goddess in a sycamore fig tree. 'By enjoying water and food in the garden the deceased is revived and could have the freedom to leave the tomb in the form of the soul bird' (Cornelius 1989:211). Similarly, the image of the beloved as a garden with its own fountain and choice fruit (Song 4:12–15), to which the boy is invited to indulge (Song 4:16), picture her and her love as a source of rejuvenation.

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109. 'Sister' and 'bride' are affectionate and intimate pet names and do not imply that the boy is related or married to his beloved (Exum 2005:169–170; 171–172; Fox 1985:135; Murphy 1990:160). Sibling terminology also appears in the erotic literature of other ancient Near Eastern cultures (cf. Ayali-Darshan 2017:202). '"Brother" and "sister" are frequent terms of affection and intimacy in the Egyptian love songs. The usage probably arose because siblings are the closest blood relations; only the closeness of that relationship is implied by the epithets' (Fox 1985:8). The same terminology is used in early Sumerian love poetry (Alster 1985:135, n. 6; Keel 1994:163).

110. Women are described with garden imagery in Sumerian and Egyptian literature as well. A well-known example is a passage from the composition entitled *The Message of Lu-dingir-ra to His Mother*: 'My mother is a heavenly rain, water for the best seeds, A bountiful harvest, which grows a second crop: A garden of delight, full of joy, An irrigated fir-tree, covered with
(footnote 110 continues…)
fir-cones: An early fruit, the yield of the first month; A canal which brings luxuriant waters to the irrigation ditches, A sweet Dilmun date, sought in its prime' (Civil 1964:3, 5; Cooper 1971:161; Hallo 2010:674). Another oft-quoted passage is from an Egyptian love song on P. Harris 500: 'I am your favorite sister. I am yours like the field planted with flowers and with all sorts of fragrant plants. Pleasant is the canal within it, which your hand scooped out, while we cooled ourselves in the north wind: a lovely place for strolling about, with your hand upon mine' (Fox 1985:26).

One of the repeated themes in Song of Songs is the arousal of love. More than once, the girl adjures the daughters of Jerusalem not to stir up love before it pleases (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). This is a warning about attempts to artificially stimulate love. The girl's natural ability to excite the boy sexually is expressed with striking similes in the first two bicola of Song of Songs 8:

> Put me like a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm,
> for strong as death is love, hard as Sheol is jealousy. (v. 6)

The girl here asks the boy to make her into an amulet and motivates her request with a compelling reason (Keel 1994):

> People in the ancient Near East did not wear seals at their breast or on their arm in order to be quickly ready to seal or authenticate something; rather, the seals, with their ornamentation, symbols, and portrayals of the gods, functioned as amulets. (p. 272)

Amulets possessed the power to ward off evil and therefore had an apotropaic function. 'They were meant to protect the wearers from misfortune and disease (the precursors of death), and, positively, to increase their vitality and lust for life' (Keel 1994:272). The seal amulet metaphor in Song of Songs 8:6 can be interpreted as the girl's request that the boy allow her to revitalise or arouse him sexually. On this interpretation, love, in the first motive clause, stands for sexual desire and jealousy, in the parallel motive clause, has to do with a feeling of protectiveness, of wanting to protect the significant other from threats, such as impotence, that could frustrate the consummation of love. The points of comparison in the similes seem to be the indomitable and unyielding natures of death and the underworld. This means that the girl motivates her request to the boy with overpowering sexual desire and unrelenting protectiveness; that is to say, her unfailing ability and commitment to ensure that he is 'alive' (sexually aroused).

The fictional Solomonic setting of the poems with the references to the king,[111] whose duty it was to maintain the divinely established order in the world,[112] alludes to the idea that the consummation of the relationship between people in love forms part of the way life is ideally supposed to be.

◼ Ecclesiastes

In the book of Ecclesiastes, the speaker, who is called by the title, Qoheleth, speaks with the authoritative voice of a Davidic king of the past and pronounces that everything in this life is fleeting and futile. Given that all are equal in death and human activities in this life lead nowhere, Qoheleth teaches that it is best

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111. Cf. Song of Songs 1:1, 5; 3:6–11; 8:11, 12.

112. Cf. footnote 108.

for human beings to find enjoyment in what they do and to fear the God who has made the world the way it is.

One of the key terms in the book is *hebel* (literally, the word means 'breath' or 'vapour' and carries connotations of ephemerality; metaphorically, it can convey a variety of ideas, including the sense of futility or vanity).[113] The book begins and ends with Qoheleth's hyperbolic exclamation that all is vanity (Ec 1:2; 12:8).[114] This implies that life itself is vain, and, sure enough, Qoheleth says this in so many words in Ecclesiastes 6:

> For who knows what is good for a person in life?
> The number of days of his vain life, he passes them like a shadow.
> For who will tell a person what will happen after him under the sun? (v. 12)

This verse, together with Ecclesiastes 6:10–11, alludes to the limitations of humans and touches on other important themes in Ecclesiastes, such as the brevity of life, the oblivion of death and the search for the good in life on earth.[115] There is only life on earth and this life, which God gives to people, is short.[116] Death is the one fate that befalls all living beings.[117] Nothing that people accumulate on earth accompanies them in death, people do not control what happens after they die (either to themselves or to what they achieved in life), and their actions do not have a substantial effect on how the world works[118] or bring about lasting gain for them.[119] Death is therefore the great equaliser.[120] Qoheleth goes on to direct people to enjoy the good things in life while they are still able to do so.[121] He gives three reasons to motivate this advice: (1) people's access to the good things suggests that God approves of their enjoyment, (2) it is God who gives people, not only a lifespan, but also a share in the good things, and (3) nothing that is achieved, thought, known or learned during life carries over into death (Ec 9):

> Come, eat your bread with enjoyment and drink your wine with a happy heart, for God has already approved your deeds.
>
> Let your garments always be white and do not let oil be lacking on your head.

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113. For discussions of *hebel*, see, for example, Meek (2016:279–297); Miller (2002); Weeks (2020:20–29).

114. Cf. also Ecclesiastes 1:14; 2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26; 3:19; 4:4, 7, 8, 16; 5:6, 9; 6:2, 4, 9, 11; 7:6; 8:10, 14; 11:8, 10.

115. Cf. Ecclesiastes 2:3 and the passages in footnote 121.

116. Cf. Ecclesiastes 2:3, 5:17; 11:8.

117. Cf. Ecclesiastes 2:14; 3:19–20; 9:2–3.

118. Cf. Ecclesiastes 1:9–11, 15; 7:13.

119. Cf., for example, Ecclesiastes 1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 4:7; 5:13–17.

120. The realisation that everyone is equal in death, which means that there is nothing to be gained from life on earth, once made Qoheleth hate life (2:17).

121. Cf. also Ecclesiastes 2:24–25; 3:12–13; 5:18–19; 6:3–6; 8:15.

> Spend life with a woman whom you love,
> all the days of your vain life that he has given to you under the sun, all your vain days,
> for that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.
>
> All that your hand finds to do in your strength, do,
> for there is no deed, or thought, or knowledge, or wisdom in Sheol, where you are going. (vv. 7–10)

Ecclesiastes here draws on ideas and images that were widespread in the ancient Near East. They also appear, independently,[122] in various genres of Egyptian[123] and Mesopotamian[124] texts (Fox 1999:12–13, 294; Krüger 2004:172–174; Lohfink 2003:119–120; Schoors 2013:676; Seow 1997:305–306). In this passage, and several others, Ecclesiastes refers to the world inhabited by people while they are still alive with the phrase 'under the sun'. The phrase, however, has more than just the realm of the living (as opposed to the underworld dwelling of the dead in Sheol) in view. Seeing as the sun not only represents life, but order as well,[125] the expression 'under the sun' implies that human life on earth plays out in an ordered world. This means that what Qoheleth says about human life, including its brevity and vanity, is expressive of how things are supposed to be in God's creation.

Humans cannot change the way God made the world and life on earth. God has not gifted human beings with the ability to see the whole picture of how

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122. Some scholars argue that Ecclesiastes was influenced by Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts (cf., for example, Anderson 2014:157–175), but direct dependence is difficult to demonstrate and, given the popularity of ideas and images in the ancient Near East (cf., e.g., Ayali-Darshan 2017:203–205), such a hypothesis hardly commends itself.

123. Cf., for example, the advice to enjoy the pleasant things in life in the face of the inevitability of death in the Harper's Song from the Tomb of King Intef (P. Harris 500 6, 10–12): 'Put myrrh on your head, Dress in fine linen, Anoint yourself with oils fit for a god. Heap up your joys, Let your heart not sink! Follow your heart and your happiness, Do your things on earth as your heart commands!' (Lichtheim 2006:196–197; cf. also Fox 1977:404, 407). The following strophes from *The Dialogue of Ipuwer and the Lord of All* connect the joyful consumption of food with divine favour and drinking alcohol with happy hearts (8.5–7; 13.13–14): 'Lo, a man is happy eating his food. Consume your goods in gladness, while there is none to hinder you. It is good for a man to eat his food. God ordains it for him whom he favors'; 'It is however good when people get drunk, When they drink *miyet* with happy hearts' (Lichtheim 2006:157; cf. also Enmarch 2008:141–142, 198). The *Instruction of Amenemhet* refers to the food, fine linen and myrrh provided by the king as indicators of a good life, while the story of Sinuhe mentions bright clothes and fine linen as examples of the amenities of home that he enjoys in his prosperity (cf. Lichtheim 2006:136, 228).

124. Cf., for example, a passage from the Old Babylonian version of the Gilgamesh epic where the barmaid-goddess, Siduri, counsels the epic's eponymous hero to give up his search for immortality, which is a fool's errand, and to enjoy the simple pleasures of domestic life (OB VA+BM iii 1–14): 'O Gilgameš, where are you wandering? You cannot find the life that you seek: when the gods created mankind, for mankind they established death, life they kept for themselves. You, Gilgameš, let your belly be full, keep enjoying yourself, day and night! Every day make merry, dance and play day and night! Let your clothes be clean! Let your head be washed, may you be bathed in water! Gaze on the little one who holds your hand! Let a wife enjoy your repeated embrace! Such is the destiny [*of mortal men*]' (George 2003:279).

125. Cf. footnote 135.

the world works (Ec 3:10–11); so, from their perspective, good and bad things are part of the ordered existence that God created. According to Qoheleth, the best thing for people is to enjoy the good things in life during the short period on earth. God gives both life and the good things to enjoy. The imperative to enjoy life is not a licence to indulge in wickedness, because there is divine judgement in life. Therefore, it is advisable to have reverence for God (Ec 5:6; 8:12; 12:13).

■ Lamentations

The five poems in the book of Lamentations look at life through the lens of past disasters. Whereas the third poem deals with personal disasters, the others have collective catastrophes in view. In many passages, the catastrophes are conceptualised as states of affairs where normal, usual or customary conditions in life are turned upside down.[126] These literary descriptions of catastrophes with *mundus inversus* (world turned upside down) imagery feature several spheres of life, including social, political, economic, juridical, religious and natural ones.[127]

An interesting example where disastrous circumstances of the past are described with *mundus inversus* imagery appears in Lamentations 5:

At the price of our lives, we came by our bread, because of the sword of the wilderness;

Our skin had become as shrivelled as an oven, because of hunger pangs. (vv. 9–10)

Normally, the threats of the wilderness (which represents a barren and uninhabitable space that is akin to the realm of death and a symbol of chaos) are removed from civilisation and chaos does not encroach on culture. Usually, a *tannur* type oven is associated with food preparation, especially the baking of bread.[128] The community, however, complains that the chaotic circumstances made it customary for them to pay for their bread with their lives. They emphasise how topsy-turvy their life-threatening situation was by using the surface of a bread baking oven as an image for their atrophied and

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126. The poems of Lamentations share this feature with other ancient Near Eastern disaster literature, especially Egyptian literary laments and the Sumerian city laments, as well as related compositions, such as the *Curse of Agade*. Cf. Dobbs-Allsopp (1993:40–41).

127. 'In a certain sense the entire life-world depicted in the laments is a *mundus inversus*. Such "*Elendsschilderungen*" are integral parts of individual laments in which the suppliant is complaining about his deplorable current predicament compared with the once ideal past. What is experienced at present equals in all respects the exact reverse of normality' (Kruger 2012:395).

128. Cf., for example, Shafer-Elliott (2013:120–121). The remains of clay ovens that have been uncovered in archaeological excavations resemble the *tannur* type of oven that is still used in the Middle East (Shafer-Elliott 2018:458).

malnourished bodies.[129] The theme of hunger is also found in some of the other poems. The inhabitants of Jerusalem had to search for bread and traded their valuables (or valuable children) for something to eat in order to stay alive (Lm 1:11), starving children looked to their mothers for food (Lm 2:12; cf. also Lm 4:3–4) and famished mothers cooked their children as food (Lm 4:10; cf. also Lm 2:20).[130] The lives of the children are mentioned again at the end of Lamentations 2. The poem portrays YHWH as a king who launched an assault on Jerusalem. The supplicants on the city walls were encouraged to lift their hands (in prayer) to the divine attacker for the sake of their children's lives. The languishing children here represent the future existence of the city that was in jeopardy at the time. Turning to Lamentations 3, the speaker in this poem was not only persecuted by YHWH, but by human antagonists as well. In Lm 3:52–54, for instance, the speaker describes the persecution he suffered at the hands of his enemies with images of inescapable, life-threatening scenarios. He first uses a hunting image (Lm 3:52), and then paints a picture of himself trapped in a cistern, covered by a stone and water rising over his head. The enemies, he notes, thereby ended his life and he concluded that he has been cut off from life (Lm 3:53–54). He cried to YHWH to save him from his hopeless plight and God immediately came to his rescue. In Lamentations 3:58, the speaker uses legal images (YHWH as a representative in court who conducts lawsuits and a kinsperson who redeems debt) to explain how God saved his life. The legal images imply that his salvation out of his distress was just, as opposed to the actions of his enemies who persecuted him without cause (Lm 3:52). Finally, in Lamentations 4, the highpoint of the description of Jerusalem's dire straits is the king's failure to protect the lives of the people (Lm 4):

> The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of YHWH, was caught in their pits, of whom we said: 'Under his shadow, we will live among the nations'. (v. 20)

The image of the king as the source of his people's lives (the air that they breathe) is widespread in the ancient Near East[131] and alludes to the royal duty of upholding the order in the world so that life in nature and human

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129. This is one of several passages in the complaint section of Lamentations 5:2–18 where the speakers express their disgrace in terms of their powerlessness to control what had happened to them.

130. Mothers who eat their children as an outcome of famine is another striking *mundus inversus* motif: 'it is a reversal of the natural order in which women feed their children' (Berlin 2002:75). Judging from its occurrence in literature from different times and places, it seems to have been a common topos in the ancient Near East. Cf., for example, Berlin (2002:75–76); Hillers (1992:88); Thomas (2013:220).

131. Cf., for example, Hillers (1992:151–152); Renkema (1998:555); Salters (2010:331). The image is found several times in the Amarna letters (Rainey 2015:718, 720, 722, 726, 728, 730), Ramesses II is called 'the breath of our nostrils' and 'the one who gives breath to every nostril' in his dedicatory inscription at Abydos (Kitchen 1979:326 [line 13], 327 [line 4]), Ramesses III is likewise referred to as 'the breath of life of humanity' in an inscription from the temple at Medinet Habu (Epigraphic Survey 1957:pl. 353 [line 4]), and in a hymn to Akhenaten, the king is said to be 'the breath of all nostrils, by whom one breathes' (Sandman 1938:24 [line 19]).

society can flourish.[132] The phrase 'under his shadow' portrays the king in the image of the winged sun disk.[133] The shadow cast by the outstretched wings of the sun signifies protection,[134] but the solar image also has life-giving and world order connotations[135] that complement those of the 'breath of nostrils'-image in the previous bicolon. On this interpretation of Lamentations 4:20, the loss of the king spells the end of his people's lives.[136]

In Lamentations, YHWH is the ultimate cause of everything that happens to individuals and communities. As the divine protagonist in the laments, he also controls the fate of the human antagonists. YHWH is not only responsible for the disasters, but for the restoration as well. In other words, looking back on the disasters of the past related in the poems, the poems make clear that YHWH not only turned the worlds of Jerusalem, its people and individuals upside down, but evidently also restored order and the continuation of life that order entails (this makes the position possible from where the poems can speak about the disasters in hindsight).

■ Esther

The concept of life finds expression in three main themes of the story of Esther: Jewish life under foreign rule, the survival of Jewish communities under threat from aggressors of other nations and the feast of Purim that celebrates the defeat of Haman, the main antagonist in the story, and the foiling of his planned pogrom against all the Jewish people in the Persian empire.

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132. See footnote 108.

133. The image of the king's shade was familiar in other ancient Near Eastern cultures as well. A good example is from the inscription on the famous stela of Hammurapi, where the king of Babylon implies that his city is safe and secure under his shade: 'The great gods having chosen me, I am indeed the shepherd who brings peace, whose sceptre is just. My benevolent shade is spread over my city, I held the people of the lands of Sumer and Akkad safely on my lap. They prospered under my protective spirit, I maintained them in peace, with my skilful wisdom I sheltered them' (Roth 1997:133).

134. See footnote 105.

135. Cf. Cornelius (1990:25–43). Cornelius (1990:31–32) mentions the winged sun disk and winged scarabs as symbols of the sun on stamp impressions on jar handles from the time of the Judean monarchy (see again fn. 105). He indicates that this iconography was adapted from Egyptian originals. 'The reason for the popularity of this specific symbol might lie in the fact that the sun symbolizes order and the control over the power of darkness and evil. It also connects king and national god. In the same way that the pharaoh was the son of the sun god and personified order, the king of Israel was' (cf. fn. 108). Cornelius (1990:26) also notes that 'light and day signify creation, life, order and salvation when the powers of chaos and the wicked are eliminated [...] The break of the new day and the rising of the sun therefore signify a new creation every day, the creation of a *Weltordnung*, forming a contrast with the night as a time of disorder, sickness, death and lurking enemies' (from this perspective, the unfailing loyalty and compassion of YHWH that are 'new every morning', according to Lamentations 3:22–23, might also have life-giving connotations).

136. Dobbs-Allsopp (1993:72) notes that the Sumerian city laments also include the theme of the king going into exile. Cf., for example, *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur*, lines 34–37 (Michalowski 1989:39).

The characters of Esther and Mordecai play central roles in the preservation of the life of the Persian king, Ahasuerus (Es 2:19–23)[137] and the lives of the Jewish communities all over the empire (Es 8:1–17; 9:1–17).[138] They are at the right place at the right time to avert the disaster. When Haman persuades Ahasuerus to issue a decree that legalises the killing of all Jewish inhabitants of his empire, Mordecai wants Esther to risk her own life to entreat the king for the good of her people (Es 4:8).[139] Esther is understandably reluctant to go into the presence of the king uninvited (Es 4:11), but Mordecai argues that inaction will not save her and he insists that she do her duty (Es 4):

> Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter,[140] but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.[141] (vv. 13–14; [NRSV])

Mordecai's message is more or less the same in the Septuagint version (Es 4):

> [D]o not say to yourself that you alone of all the Judeans in the empire will be safe. Because even if you keep silent at this time, from elsewhere help and protection will come to the Judeans, but you and your father's household will perish. And who knows if for this time you were made queen? (vv. 13–14; [NETS])

Mordecai does not refer to divine intervention in the versions of the story preserved by the Masoretic text and the Septuagint, but in the Alpha-text (Es 4), he explicitly states that God will save the lives of his people:

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137. Ahasuerus is usually understood as a Hebrew version of the Persian name of king Xerxes (485 BC–465 BC). In the Septuagint version, however, the king in question is Artaxerxes (465 BC–424 BC). The other Greek version of Esther, the so-called Alpha-text, transliterates the name as Assyeros.

138. The Greek versions of Esther include six sections that are not in the available Hebrew text (Additions A–F). On the differences in the chapter and verse numbering of the Greek versions, see De Troyer (2019:240–241).

139. Interestingly, in the Greek versions, Mordecai directs Esther to pray before interceding on behalf of the people to save their lives (LXX 4:8: 'Call upon the Lord, and speak to the king about us, and deliver us from death!' Alpha-text 4:5: 'Therefore call upon God, and speak about us to the king, and deliver us from death!'). The Greek texts record Esther's prayer (LXX Addition C:12–30; Alpha-text 4:18–29) and indicate that God intervened to make the king well-disposed towards her when she stands before him (LXX Addition D:8: 'God changed the spirit of the king to gentleness'; Alpha-text 5:8: 'God changed the spirit of the king and turned his anger to gentleness').

140. Some scholars interpret 'another quarter' as a veiled allusion to God (cf., e.g., Levenson 1997:81; Moore 1971:50). Other scholars, however, object that such an interpretation of the expression creates more problems than it solves: 'the stark contrast set up thereby between the divine deliverance and the deliverance that Esther might achieve by her appeal to the king necessarily implies that the latter is not from God. This flies in the face of the clear implication of the whole text, and particularly verse 14c, that Esther's position and actions are the outworking of divine providence' (Bush 1996:396; cf. also Clines 1984:36; De Troyer 2003:19–21; Fox 2001:63; Melton 2018:61).

141. The phrase 'a time as this' suggests that the present threat to the lives of the Jewish people is not a unique occurrence.

> If you ignore your nation and do not help them, then surely God will be to them a helper and deliverance, but you and your father's household will perish. And who knows if for this time you were made queen? (vv. 9–10; [NETS])

The three versions of the passage embody the important idea that the survival of the Jewish people at large is certain, but the fate of individuals and their immediate families depends on their own actions. Human plans and agency have a place in how things turn out for individuals, but the continued life of Jewish people under foreign rule is secure (in other words, the passage seems to combine a 'deterministic' view of survival with an idea about individual responsibility in times of trouble). The theme of Jewish life under foreign rule is also linked to the idea of order. Haman's plot to destroy all the Jewish people in the empire is predicated on the accusation that they have their own laws and they do not keep the king's laws (Es 3:8). Haman thereby accuses the Jewish people of posing a threat to the order maintained by the king. The king decrees that the Jewish people are to be executed (an official decision that is meant to re-establish order; Es 3:10–15). The reaction of Mordecai and the Jewish communities throughout the empire is telling. They do not rebel or start a revolt, but go into mourning (Es 4:1–3). Their mourning gestures are symbolic actions whereby they indicate that their world has been turned upside down.[142] These actions recognise that their lives are completely in the hands of the king, and, they do not incite unrest (if the Jewish people did rebel and cause unrest, their actions would confirm Haman's accusation that they are responsible for disorder). Another important theme in the Esther story that is related to the concept of life is the turnaround of fortunes. For example, Haman has to bestow the honours he wants for himself on Mordecai as a reward for saving the life of the king (Es 6:1–13); the execution Haman plans for Mordecai (Es 5:13–14) becomes the one the king orders for him as punishment for endangering the lives of Mordecai and the Jewish people (Es 7:10); when Haman's planned pogrom is foiled, the Jewish communities are allowed by royal decree to protect their lives against attacks. In this regard, Esther 8:11–13 turns Esther 3:13–14 on its head (lives endangered becomes lives protected) and Esther 8:15–17 turns Esther 4:1–3 on its head (mourning becomes rejoicing).

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142. Kruger (2005:41–49) points out that many of the mourning gestures described in Hebrew Bible writings are expressions of the idea of the world turned upside down. The same tactic is followed by the Jewish community at Elephantine when their temple was destroyed by troops under the command of Nafaina, the son of the local governor, Vidranga, with whom the priests of the god Khnum conspired to remove the temple of YHW. In a letter to Bagohi, the governor of Yehud, the priestly leaders of the community indicate that they have been in mourning ever since the temple's destruction: 'And when this had been done (to us), we with our wives and our children were wearing sackcloth and fasting and praying to YHW the Lord of Heaven […] from the month of Tammuz, year 14 of King Darius and until this day we are wearing sackcloth and fasting; our wives are made as widow(s); (we) do not anoint (ourselves) with oil and do not drink wine' (Porten & Yardeni 1986:71). By remaining in mourning and enlisting the help of the authorities in Yehud, the community shows that they are not planning to rebel or make trouble. The mourning gestures also signify that the destruction of the YHW temple has turned their world topsy-turvy. This means that Elephantine is in disorder as long as the temple lies in ruins. Rebuilding the temple, however, would restore things to the way they are supposed to be.

According to Esther 9:1, the enemies of the Jewish people hoped to get mastery over them, but they got mastery over their enemies. All of this is celebrated during the feast of Purim. The theme of Purim is the turnaround from danger to relief, from sorrow to gladness and from mourning to holiday (Es 9:18–32). The feast also includes sending food to one another and to the poor. This fits well with the idea, exemplified by the characters of Esther and Mordecai (cf. Es 10:3), that doing good to Jewish people will bring rewards in life, but plotting evil against them will end in the evildoers' downfall.

Like the Song of Songs, God is not mentioned in the Hebrew version of the story of Esther and unlike Lamentations and the Greek versions of Esther,[143] the role that God plays in the history of events is not certain. What is clear is that Jewish life under foreign rule is secure. The Jewish people will survive and continue their way of life. At times, this life may come under threat, but the story of Esther suggests that, under such circumstances, it will not do to rebel and incite revolt. This may put Jewish lives more at risk. Rather, the right people will be in the right places at the right times to ensure that Jewish people can continue their way of life. The feast of Purim celebrates this continuation of life and provides an opportunity for Jewish people to do good to one another, in imitation of the example set by Esther and Mordecai.

■ Conclusion

In an important study on the meaning of 'life' in the Hebrew Bible, Shemaryahu Talmon has precious little to say about the *Megilloth*.[144] These five books, however, are not irrelevant to research on the concept of life in early Jewish literature. On the contrary (Bandstra 2009):

> [*W*]e find some of Israel's most mature thinking on the deeper issues of life in the Five Scrolls. Love, loyalty, freedom, destiny, death [...] Together [*the Scrolls*] reveal a tradition that framed worthy responses to the human condition. (p. 419)

143. Although God is not mentioned in the Hebrew version of Esther, both of the Greek versions are full of God-talk (Boyd-Taylor 2015:214–216; Melton 2018:59–74). It is debated whether the religious language was added by the Greek versions or removed from the available Hebrew version. Cf., for example, Clines (1984:107–112) and Jobes (1996:212–213). What is clear, however, is that the Masoretic text, the Septuagint and the Alpha-text preserve three different retellings of the story of Esther with different emphases and characterisations of God and the story's main role players (De Troyer 2019:242–243; De Troyer & Rediger Schulte 2009:35–40; Fox 2001:255–273).

144. Nevertheless, his conclusion is worth quoting in full: 'Biblical literature as a whole reveals a high esteem for physical life, for human existence *haec et nunc*. The prevailing notion is realistic. In the world of ancient Israelite ideas, life as such is explicitly assigned a positive value. Biblical man enjoys life, that is, sound and good life, which he wants to savour to the last bit. Death and affliction are evaluated negatively. They are always seen as punishment for misdeeds and as inevitable restrictions on human existence, the negative counterparts to life and happiness. Death is the final end of human existence. The individual can only live on in his offspring, that is, in the amalgamation of his personality with a collective entity – family, tribe and nation. The notion of life which the Bible promotes is just and righteous life in the society which constitutes itself in the Holy Land promised by God, oriented towards the divine teaching – the Torah' (Talmon 2013:248–249).

This chapter only scratches the surface of the responses and the topic deserves to be studied in much greater detail. The few observations presented here, however, suggest that detailed analyses of the concept of life in the Five Scrolls will do well to examine the different versions of the texts' wordings and subject matter,[145] the languages in which their subject matter are put into words, their literary features and the larger cultural and intellectual environment in which the languages, ideas and images related to life are embedded. The resources for the study of the latter include not only ancient Near Eastern literature, but visual images, and material culture as well.[146]

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145. From textual, historical and theological points of view, it would be methodologically suspect to single out only one version, or even versions in only one language, for the study of the concept of life in the Five Scrolls. Such a reductionist approach would eliminate, without
(footnote 145 continues...)
further ado, data that are potentially relevant for textual, historical, and theological research on the topic.

146. In this regard, Cornelius (1988:54) is correct when he states that 'Biblical scholars have to learn not only to read texts, but also to see and interpret art'. Cf. also Cornelius (2017:195, 2018:158).

Life in Daniel: A theology of life beyond its perceived end

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■ Introduction

Doing theology in the field of Biblical Studies, as well as the result of such an enterprise is often seen to be a life-enriching experience. Furthermore, it can also be perceived as a life-giving experience; especially in evangelical and ecclesiastically defined contexts and faculties. Therefore, it is surprising that a theme related to the various manifestations of a theology of life in the Bible has not received more attention in these academic circles. This chapter on a theology of life as it manifests in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament will attend to the following issues: a brief outline of current scholarly consensus on the book of Daniel; then follows a more detailed discussion on understanding the book as an ancient text and finally, based on the overviews provided, the contribution that the book makes to the overarching theme, A Theology of Life, is considered.

■ Scholarly consensus and other improbabilities related to the book of Daniel

The book of Daniel is quite unique in the corpus of books known as the Old Testament. The book's uniqueness is seen in the characteristics discussed here, which are also the reasons behind much of the scholarly discourse associated with the book.

First, we consider the placement of the book in the canon. The book of Daniel is listed among the prophets in the fourfold division of the Old Testament, but forms part of the so-called writings in the tripartite Hebrew Bible. This unique characteristic gave rise to much debate among scholars, although in some cases their arguments reflect scholarly prejudices rather than tangible evidence. Koch (1985), for instance, argues on the basis of evidence from the New Testament for the original placement of the book among the prophets, while not taking into account the tradition that resulted in the authoritative lists in the *Mishnah* (*Bava Batra*, 14b).

Secondly, the book is unique because of its bilingual character in the Masoretic text tradition. Although the book of Ezra is also written partly in Aramaic (see Ezr 4:8–6:18; 7:12–26), in the book of Daniel the Aramaic and Hebrew sections are almost of equal length. Roughly specified, the first chapter is written in Hebrew, the following six are in Aramaic (Dn 2–7) and the last five chapters (Dn 8–12) revert back to the use of Hebrew. More precisely, the introductory Hebrew section continues up to Daniel 2:4a where a natural change to Aramaic could be introduced by reporting the speech of the 'Chaldeans'. This Aramaic part of the book continues up to the end of Chapter 7 (Dn 7:28). The ingenious solutions scholars have put forward to explain this peculiarity have already been summarised (Van Deventer 2013:240–243).

Thirdly, there are the different literary types found in the book. Perhaps better-known among ordinary readers of the Bible, are the first six chapters consisting of as many narratives. These are all concerned with the lives of the Jewish heroes in the book, but mainly that of Daniel, at the royal courts of foreign kings. The last six chapters describe what are commonly referred to as visions and strongly suggest the rubric apocalypse as a suitable label. The work by Hanson (1975) among others sparked renewed interest in this type of literature and led to focused scholarly activity reflecting on not only this form of literature, but also on the social setting(s) of the authors responsible for these texts, as well as cautious descriptions of apocalyptic worldviews, which these texts may be linked to. As regards defining this literary type, the proposal made by Collins (1979) remains the preferred option:

> 'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world. (p. 9)

Lastly, the book's more elaborate content in some of the Christian canonical traditions deserves a mention here. The ancient Septuagint (LLX) translation of the book into Greek, and hence also the Latin Vulgate, includes three additional stories and a prayer that does not form part of the Hebrew or Aramaic text and hence are also not found in the Old Testament as used in the Protestant tradition. To complicate matters further, the LXX version is not the only Greek translation of the book of Daniel from antiquity available to us. An older translation, generally referred to as the Old Greek version, predates this somewhat later LXX that is commonly referred to as the 'Theodotion' version. However, as the New Testament seemingly relies on this 'Theodotion' version for its references to the book of Daniel, it probably predates the 2nd century AD persona whose name became associated with it (Davis Bledsoe 2015:180–181). This latter 'Theodotion' version became the official document of the church because of the fact that it resembles the Hebrew and Aramaic book much more closely than the older Old Greek version, especially as regards the narratives in Chapter 4 to Chapter 6.

Any attempt to contribute to a theological discussion on the book, should take note of these characteristics and how they may influence the proposed theological understanding. Hence, these issues will to some extent be reflected in the ensuing discussion. In the present context, the text under scrutiny will be the shorter text that the Protestant churches include in their canonical tradition and which is based on the Masoretic text. The deuterocanonical additions in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, however, will be referred to towards the conclusion of the chapter in order to underscore the thrust of what is proposed here as a theology of life beyond its perceived end.

■ Reading an ancient religious text, a couple of millennia later

How does one read an ancient religious text that dates back more than 2000 years? The short answer to this question is: it depends on your context. The reading strategy that most Christian believers will be well-acquainted with is a straightforward reading of the text as it stands. The advantage of such a reading is that anyone can do it and no specialised knowledge of the original languages, the development of the text in a specific historical context or the complicated intricacies of the hermeneutical process need any further pondering. The disadvantage of this strategy, if it is not already apparent, is that very little regard is shown for matters related to the history of the text, the literary character of the text, as well as the role of the reader in the process of discovering meaning in the text.

If one chooses to negate these matters, which are of immense interest to mainline biblical scholarship, and stick to a straightforward reading then more often than not, meaning is reduced to a spiritual blessing contained in a few

biblical verses and applied to the individual circumstances of the reader. Such a reading brings the rather sharp words of the evangelical scholar Kaiser (2007:125) to mind: 'Good for the blessing – but not so good for the text to which you are attributing it'.

Taking into account the high regard for Scripture as Word of God in a 'Reformational' context, surely, scholarly matters related to the whole communication process (involving author, text and reader) all need careful scrutiny. So, if one's context is the world of academia with its focus on uncovering and disseminating new knowledge by means of developing and applying peer-acknowledged methodologies in your study of a universe of phenomena, then reading the Bible becomes a bit less straightforward. In the study of this ancient religious text, we have access to methodologies informing inquiries about the historical, literary and readerly aspects related to these revered ancient texts. Also, if our aim is a theological understanding of the text in an academic context, these general aspects related to the world of texts should be borne in mind.

When it comes to the text of the book of Daniel, much work has already been done in relation to all three of these broad approaches to a text. It is not possible to summarise these insights here, nor will it necessarily contribute to the present topic. However, a brief word on how this chapter relates to current knowledge regarding each of the mentioned three approaches concerning the book of Daniel, should be noted.

A historical point of departure

As regards a historical approach to the text, modern biblical scholarship is almost unanimous in the distinction it makes between the history *in* the text and the history *of* the text (Hayes & Holladay 2007:53). This distinction is not the result of only modern insights, though. Already in antiquity, in the late 3rd century, the philosopher Porphyry proposed that the prophecies in the book of Daniel were written in the 2nd century BC during the Antiochene crisis and do not date from the 6th century BC as the history (world) *in* the text suggests.

This historical narrative that runs through the book of Daniel places it in the 6th century BC at the royal courts of kings from the Babylonian and subsequent world empires. It is at this location where the hero of the book, Daniel, one of the exiled Jewish youths, and his three friends experience the great miracles and wonders that their God did for their, and ultimately also his benefit (ch. 1 to ch. 6). The latter part of the book (ch. 7 to ch. 12) describes how only Daniel is privileged by access to divine knowledge when he is not only the receiver of a series of visions, but also gets angelic assistance to understand these strange sights.

Although not agreeing on the finer details, modern biblical scholarship sees the book in its final form as a product of the 2nd century BC. The history

of the text, according to this view, does not end in the 6th century BC, but rather takes us right into the period of the severe persecution of the Jewish population in Jerusalem in the years 167 BC–164 BC during the reign of the Seleucid emperor Antiochus IV. The traditional scholarly theory goes that at first the book consisted only of a collection of (Aramaic) narratives to which the visions were subsequently added during the crisis caused by Antiochus' actions (Collins 1993:38). The reason(s) for the persecution of Jews in Jerusalem by Antiochus remain(s) obscure. As Newson (2014:136) remarks: 'Persecution for religious reasons was basically unknown in Hellenistic culture'. Because of the book of Daniel making no mention of the rededication of the temple in 164 BC after the Maccabean revolt, it is presumed that the *terminus ad quem* for the book's origin should be placed prior to that date and event.

This theory was recently challenged by proposing that the vision part of the book, dating from the 2nd century BC, was in fact the original prophetic book of Daniel, and only after the Maccabean successes were the narratives included to form part of the book in its present canonical forms (Van Deventer 2013). This proposal has received favourable comments (see Lombaard 2019:117; Satlow 2017) and as regards the historical context of the book, it is the starting point from where this article shall argue its case for a theology of life as presented in the book.

■ A literary point of departure

Turning to the text itself, there are nowadays a wide range of reading methods to use that focus exclusively on the text, while bracketing the historical concerns noted above. Unlike the historical approaches, these text-orientated methods, in their purer forms, are not interested in constructing any real world outside the narrative world created by the text. Rather, the focus falls on the various narrative techniques employed to arrive at a meaning. Of course, these methods are not only applied to narrative texts; other genres are equally productively studied by investigating the literary techniques and general stylistic features of poetic forms of the writing encountered in the psalms and prophetic books.

An aspect related to a text-orientated approach, but not frequently noted in studies on the book of Daniel apart from discussing the different genres and languages found in the book, relates to the structure of the book in its final Masoretic form. Lenglet (1972) was the first to describe the chiastic structure of the Aramaic part of the book (ch. 2 to ch. 7). According to his proposal, there are distinct similarities between Chapter 2 and Chapter 7 (four empire schemes), Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 (persecutions stories) and Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 (hubris of foreign rulers). Building on to this proposal and pointing to the emphasis placed on the central section of such a concentric structure, Shea (1985a, 1985b), in a typical text-centred argument, suggested

a chiastic structure in the two central chapters of the Aramaic section (ch. 4 and ch. 5).

Goldingay (1989:8) in his commentary on the book of Daniel, noted that the very first chapter in the book, written in Hebrew, also displays a concentric structure, inviting the reader to note this similarity shared with the next (Aramaic) section of the book (ch. 2 to ch. 7). In Daniel 1, verses 1–2 and verse 21 form the outer boundaries of this pattern (referring to the beginning and end of the period of exile). Between these outward borders and the central section (vv. 8–16 – the dietary test of the four youths), Verses 3–7 and Verses 17–20 introduce the reader to the four Jewish youths and their exceptional rise within the Babylonian court. Goldingay (1989:12) notes the close connection between these two 'panels' in the chapter. In fact, the central narrative (vv. 8–16) inserted between these verses can be removed without hampering the narrative flow of the chapter; Verse 17 follows quite naturally on Verse 7.

If Daniel 1 indeed sensitises the reader to pay attention to structure and more specifically the focal chapters in the Aramaic section, one would not be surprised if the Hebrew section (ch. 8 to ch. 12) consisting of three sections, would also exhibit a concentric structure in which the emphasis falls on the central section. These sections can be demarcated as follows: Chapter 8 (vision and interpretation); Chapter 9 (text and interpretation) and Chapter 10 to Chapter 12 (vision and interpretation). This phenomenon was subsequently suggested in a contribution that focused on the possible theological traditions that contributed to the writing of the book (Van Deventer 2001). It can be noted here that independently, and much more authoritatively, Boccaccini (2002:181) reached a similar conclusion regarding the structure of Daniel 8–12. Van Deventer (2001:75) inferred that the central placement of Daniel 9, with its content presenting a distinctive Deuteronomistic line of thought, may be read as 'a critical reflection' on the apocalyptic pattern of thought demonstrated in the surrounding visions. The argument made in the present contribution will refer to this conclusion and furthermore rely on these focal sections in both the Hebrew and Aramaic sections to shed light on the theological theme of life.

■ A readerly point of departure

A final way of reading an ancient (or, for that matter, any) text places emphasis on the role of the reader as co-creator or, as some would have it, sole creator of meaning during the reading process. The latter, of course, refers to the ideas of Fish (1980) who allows for multiple meanings created by the reader, but at the same time curtails subjectivity by describing the role played by interpreting communities in deciding (stable) meanings. The notion of readers

co-creating meaning noted above, refers to the theoretical work done by Iser (1980). According to this theory, readers are constantly filling gaps prevalent in any literary text while being 'guided' by the text. In this process meaning is co-created by the reader. During the latter half of the 20th century, the optimistic and positivistic assumptions prevalent in the historical critical method had to be reviewed in light of new perspectives introduced from both literary and readerly observations (Barton 1998:9–20). It dawned on academics that their situation in the world and the commitments that form the bases for their academic work do indeed influence the way they perceive the world and the phenomena they study in that world. More importantly, these commitments (faith-based, or otherwise) also have an influence on the results of their scholarship. Kuhn (1970) famously demonstrated this to also be the case with scholarship in the natural sciences. In the Philosophy Department of the erstwhile Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, the idea of the subjective nature of all research in fact formed the cornerstone on which a specific branch of Christian Philosophy was built.

So, it became quite fashionable during the last quarter of the 20th century to suggest new meanings for ancient texts by reading these texts from a specific modern location. These locations include a myriad of perspectives, usually aligned to groups that did not form part of the mainstream academia in the past. The most well-known examples include liberation, feminist, black, ecological and of late also post-colonial readings of sacred and other texts. All these approaches are unapologetically subjective in foregrounding their diverse experiences and views of the world as the glasses they deliberately chose for reading the biblical text. In most cases, these committed reading perspectives allow for the validity of other readings but still privilege their particular understanding as the best suited to correct the social ills informing and fuelling their current (bad) experiences in the world.

Although not explicitly stated, it can be deduced from the argument presented by Lombaard (2006:914) that biblical interpretations informed by particular religious commitments should also be classified under the rubric of reader-orientated approaches. This makes sense if one understands a specific religious community's faith commitments as the glasses through which they chose to read and understand a text. In the same way that other reader-orientated interpretations are informed by a specific social location, so religious communities also decide on how their specific community should understand a text.

The importance of one's social location for understanding a text will be the last leaf taken from the book on how to read an ancient religious text. In the context of this publication, it was decided that the notion of 'life' in a theological sense will be the glasses through which the book of Daniel will be read.

■ Uncovering a theology of life in the book of Daniel

The thoughts above will influence the rest of the argument in the following way. Firstly, taking a cue from the structure of the book in its final Masoretic form, the two literary parts of the book will be discussed in their suggested historical (and literary) contexts. Also, the suggested readerly perspective related to 'life' in the book will be dovetailed with the rest of the discussion. However, by way of introduction, it is necessary to look at the few explicit references made to 'life' in the book of Daniel.

As a noun, 'life' [*ḥyy*] appears only a few times in the book; twice in the Aramaic section (Dn 4:31 [MT],[147] 7:12) and twice in the Hebrew section (Dn 12:2, 7). Building on the notion that the latter Hebrew part of the book of Daniel (ch. 8 to ch. 12) was in fact the original prophetic book of Daniel, the discussion begins with the manifestation of life in this 'prophetic' section. Beginning with the last part of the book immediately leads to what many believe not only to be the pinnacle of the theological development in the book of Daniel, but also of the Hebrew Bible in totality. The verse reads (Dn 12 [NRSV]):

> Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting *life* [*ḥaye'*], and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (v. 2)

In Hebrew, the word for 'life' is in the plural and forms part of a construct chain linking it to the noun for eternity ['*olam*], with the meaning as translated above. Not much is revealed, however, about this eternal existence. It does seem to be earth bound, though, and is contrasted with another form of eternal existence, namely one of everlasting (again, '*olam*) insult and abhorrence. Here, preference was given to a harsher translation of the Hebrew words *cherpah* and *dəra'own* as opposed to what the NRSV opted for (see Ps 69:10, 11 [MT] and Is 66:24 for such translations of the same words in the NRSV). 'Life' as it is used here, appears to be a reward for those who remained faithful during their 'first' lives. Although the context (see Dn 12:1 – 'there shall be a time of anguish') may suggest that they lost their lives as a result of persecution, this interpretation remains doubtful, however, given the (unfaithful) 'some' who had also died, but will arise to a far less satisfying existence of 'insult and abhorrence'. In both instances there is no hint at an existence separate from a (resurrected) body (*contra* 1 Ec 22:3; Jl 23:31; see Newsom[148] [2014:745–746]). The word used here for sleep [*yšn*] is used elsewhere in the Old Testament mostly as a sleep one would expect to wake from. A different word is used for the stock expression 'slept [*škb*] with his fathers' that is often

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147. MT is used as an abbreviation for Masoretic Text and occurs in this chapter in cases where the versification in this text differs from that found in modern translations.

148. The page numbers quoted for this source are from the Scribd.com version of the commentary. Because of a nationwide lockdown related to COVID-19, I was not able to check the paper copy of the commentary.

found in the books of Kings and Chronicles when referring to death. Psalm 13:4 (MT) is one of the few instances where *yšn* is used to refer to death (see also Job 3:13).

Bauckham (1998:81) follows a long tradition of scholars who cites this as the one text in the Old Testament that 'certainly' refers to 'immortality for the righteous and to judgement for the wicked'. Of course, this being the last chapter of the book of Daniel in its Protestant canonical form, but the first appearance of 'life' following the suggestion above to begin with what is viewed as the original (prophetic) part of the book, leaves a number of unresolved issues, which will be addressed in the course of the argument discussed further. The first one of these that can only be noted here, relates to the origin of this idea that a resurrection of the body into a life after death is at all possible. Here, the suggested origins can basically be narrowed down to only three main contenders: a majority of scholars suggest Persian influence, others point to Egypt, while some even suggest a Canaanite influence (see Elledge 2015:44–57).

As already noted, Daniel 12:2 is one of only a few places in the book where this particular word for 'life' is used. Compared to the vast number of times the word 'life' appears in the wisdom literature (especially Proverbs), it is not difficult to see why Von Rad's (1972:263–283) suggestion that the book of Daniel had its roots not in the prophetic, but rather in the wisdom tradition, did not make significant inroads in scholarly circles. Limiting the notion of wisdom influences found in the book of Daniel to what is referred to as mantic wisdom, as suggested by Von der Osten-Sacken (1970), proved to be somewhat more productive. Classical Near Eastern wisdom literature is concerned to have life and living adjusted to fit into a pattern God created, and in doing so experience the good that life had to offer.

In Daniel 12:2, 'life' is connected to the adjective 'eternal or everlasting'. In the historical contexts relevant for understanding the book as described earlier, this reference perhaps served the purpose of comforting those Jews who were being persecuted by the forces of Antiochus IV. As is the case with the structural counterpart of this vision that is found in Daniel 8, the text in its broader context helps in answering the question 'how long' will the present period of turmoil last? In Daniel 8, the focus is more specifically on the desecration of the religious centre, the temple and its eventual restoration:

> Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one that spoke, 'For how long is this vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled?' And he answered him, 'For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings; then *the sanctuary shall be restored* to its rightful state'. […] 'The vision of the evenings and the mornings that has been told is true'. (vv. 13–14, 26; [NRSV])

In Daniel 12, the focus also seems to include the time until the persecution of the people will come to an end, although towards the end of the chapter

specific reference is made again to religious activities associated with the temple:

> And I heard him swear by the one who lives forever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be accomplished. (v. 7; [NRSV])

> From the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that desolates is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred ninety days. Happy are those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred thirty-five days. (vv. 11–12; [NRSV])

When taking the evidence provided by both chapters regarding the 'how long' question into account, there is no agreement as to a single fixed period that can be given, not even by the angelic interpreters. It seems as if this uncertainty, which is retained in the text, can even be understood as undermining the apocalyptic tenure of these chapters. Could it be that the author(s) of the book retained these uncertainties as a form of criticism against an apocalyptic mindset that was developing among a people who were suffering severe persecution? This suggestion finds similar literary strategies in the books of Job and Ecclesiastes.

In the book of Job, the narrative frame of the book in fact reiterates the cause–effect of the traditional retribution theology that the poetic section (Job 3–41) wishes to engage with and turn on its head. Similarly, the almost universally accepted addition to the book of Ecclesiastes (12:9–14) serves as a clarion call to a more traditional wisdom outlook where the fear of the Lord and keeping his commandments are upheld as the answer to the preceding flirting with Hellenistic ideas that may have been gaining traction in a section of the Jewish community.

In the case of the book of Daniel, the idea of a bodily resurrection and a new life, especially in the face of persecution as the later addition of the narratives in Daniel 3 (the fiery furnace) and Daniel 6 (the lions' den) underscore, seems to be the major development among the prevalent apocalyptic ideas that these author(s) wished to retain. Such a line of thought is given further support by placing a much more traditional view about life and how it should be lived at the centre of the vision section. This will be elaborated on further when the structurally centred sections of both the vision and narrative genres will be discussed in light of the present topic. Before doing that, however, we first need to conclude the consideration of the use of the word 'life' in the book.

In addition to this extraordinary new concept of life after a bodily resurrection from death, the visions in the book of Daniel (ch. 7 to ch. 12) use the word 'life' only a further two times. The first of these instances occurs in the first vision, where, in Daniel 7:12 it is noted that the lives (plural) of the three strange beasts introduced by this vision were 'prolonged for a season

and a time', although their 'dominion was taken away'. This stands in stark contrast with the fourth and last beast who was killed and utterly destroyed (Dn 7:11). In an apocalyptic literary setting, all these beasts refer to foreign rulers. The extension of the lives, although not the dominion, of some foreign rulers echoes the sentiment found in the central narratives (ch. 4 and ch. 5) in the Aramaic section. There it is made clear that the Most High has sovereignty over the kingdoms of mortals and gives it to whom he pleases (Dn 4:14, 21, 29 [all MT]; 5:21). The only other reference to life in the vision section occurs in the construct form 'the forever living' (Dn 12:7), obviously referring to God. A similar construction, with the same meaning, is also attested in the Aramaic narratives (Dn 4:31 [MT]).

Also in the narratives, the same root is used in the sense of an adjective ('[any or all] living') in Daniel 2:30 and Daniel 4:14 (MT). The other occurrences of the root *ḥyy* are attested in verbal form. Very often, as dictated by the court tale genre, the word is used in the royal greeting 'O king, live forever!' (Dn 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:7, 22). In the context of what has been said so far it is clear that these utterances can also be read ironically (cf. Newsom 2014:406; Portier-Young 2011:180). The foreign earthly rulers stand as total mismatches next to the 'Most High God' of whom one of these rulers has to exclaim eventually: 'His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his sovereignty is from generation to generation' (Dn 3:33 [MT]).

From the discussion so far, it is clear that unlike the wisdom literature, for instance, life does not feature very prominently in the book of Daniel. This does not mean, however, that the book cannot contribute to the present discussion about a theology of life. As is the case with much of the Old Testament, the book of Daniel seeks to impact lives in a more indirect and subtle way – by telling the reader about the lives and life experiences of other characters. Exactly what the book wishes to convey, is sought here in the structuring of the book, with the following sections forming the focal points of the discussion: Daniel 1:8–16 (the centre of the introductory narrative); Daniel 4 and Daniel 5 (the centre of the Aramaic section) and Daniel 9 (the centre of the Hebrew section). Staying true to the argument that the Hebrew section was the original book of Daniel, Chapter 9 is the first fact to be highlighted.

In this visionary section, oddly enough, the central focus seems to fall on the old Mosaic covenant that is thereby suggested to also be called into remembrance for a community in distress. In the narrative world, this chapter gets its impetus from Daniel reading in the 'books' about the 70 years that according to the prophet Jeremiah, 'must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem' (Dn 9:2). Then follow acts (Dn 9:3) and a prayer (Dn 9:4–19) of penitence. In this prayer, which is similar to such supplications found in post-exilic literature (see Ezr 9:6–15; Neh 9:5–37), Daniel confesses on behalf of God's people the sins they committed. Specific mention is made of not

listening 'to your servants the prophets' (Dn 9:6), and so the present calamity 'as it is written in the law of Moses' (Dn 9:13) had befallen them. These references to an older tradition in the middle of the Hebrew section can be understood in at least two ways. They may either serve to undermine the surrounding apocalyptic material by suggesting a return to more traditional forms of revelation (presented by the prophets and the law of Moses); or, they serve to indicate how these traditional forms of revelation can link up with, and be incorporated into newer apocalyptic ideas about revelation. Nel (2013) lists a number of arguments supporting the place of Daniel 9 in the apocalyptic section of the book.

A good rhetorical ploy when trying to persuade people of a new point of view, is to begin what is familiar to them. So, in the context of the persecution by Antiochus IV, and the attempts in the surrounding literature to seek answers to when this situation will dissipate, Daniel 9 is less specific than the surrounding visions. Yes, Gabriel does mention a timeframe of 70 weeks of years (sometimes still interpreted as fixed period of 490 years) in a distinctly non-literal interpretation (Dn 9:24) of the words of Jeremiah, but the message seems to be that the 'exilic' context cannot be measured precisely. What should bring hope, though, is that this period, as initially written by Jeremiah and reinterpreted by Gabriel, has ended (Dn 9:27). The issue that remains now is to stay committed to the words of the prophets and the law of Moses. While the surrounding visions reflect in their mention of specific numbers of days (1150, in Dn 8:14; or 1290 and 1335 days, respectively, in Dn 12:11, 12) the turmoil that persisted in Jerusalem even after the successes of the Maccabees, Daniel 9 suggests a return to the tradition of the prophets and the law to provide a compass for living in those troubled times.

Such a revisiting of older traditions can also be found in other collections in the Old Testament. A similar development seems to occur in the compilation of the Psalms. Niemand (2019:111) notes how in Book I–III of the Psalter God's faithfulness to the Davidic covenant is celebrated. The demise of this covenant is reflected towards the end of Book III, until it is eventually terminated with the fall of Jerusalem. The lament in Psalm 88 is linked to this tragedy, and although Psalm 89 again raises the hope of a restored Davidic covenant, in Psalm 90, Book IV 'responds to the crisis by turning back to the Mosaic covenant' when introducing the reader to the only 'Prayer of Moses' in the collection.

The reference to the period of the exile at the beginning of the book of Daniel (Dn 1:1–2, 21) creates a suitable context for understanding the narratives that were added to the Danielic prophetic or visionary corpus. The idea of an extended period of exile is obvious from Daniel 9, as discussed earlier. However, reintroducing this theme to a 2nd century audience creates concern. This time the desecration of the temple is not solely the work of an outside force, as was

the case with the Babylonian exile. Although Antiochus IV ultimately became involved, the looting of the temple by none other than the High Priest, Menelaus, in order to secure his position (Newsom 2014:136) meant that there was also an enemy from within the Jewish ranks. 2 Maccabees 4 gives a vivid description of how the temple was looted by those officiating in it.

Apart from revisiting the prophetic tradition and the law as deduced from the central position of Daniel 9 in the apocalyptic part of the book, how should the Jews who found themselves more at home in the ambit of the quietist Daniel group in society live their lives? The answer to this question is given in the well-known narratives about Daniel and his friends (Dn 1–6), which were added to the visions. A previous suggestion by Humphreys (1973) that these narratives suggest a lifestyle for diaspora Jews should be refocused, at least as far as the book of Daniel is concerned, on this later period. Instead of dealing with the diaspora Jews in the Persian empire, which is a setting wherein no such atrocities against them as described in Daniel 3 and Daniel 6 (persecution stories) occurred; these narratives with their central focus on the hubris of foreign rulers (Dn 4; 5) in the context of God's eternal rule (Dn 2; 7) wish to set the tone for life in a post-Antiochene world. In such a world, in which the Daniel group opposed the militancy of the Maccabees (Dn 11:34), life should remain committed to the Law of Moses. Even though their culture might become more inclusive as the acceptance of some cultural changes in Daniel 1 suggests, this group still prides itself in setting certain limits to their actions, as the central narrative in the opening chapter dealing with food preferences makes clear. In fact, these limits go beyond any specific dietary laws given in the *Torah*.

Furthermore, this group should not be concerned about past, present or future earthly rulers; ultimately God not only determines and limits their rule; but through the witness of the faithful God can steer a ruler to acknowledge God's reign (Dn 4) that has already been revealed to these faithful (Dn 2 and Dn 7). Alternatively, God can abruptly end such a ruler's tenure (Dn 5).

■ Conclusion

This contribution attempted to address the question related to a theology of life put to the book of Daniel. In seeking to uncover such a theology, it was thought prudent to first establish a present picture of scholarly work dealing with the understanding of the book. Care was taken not to focus on only one approach to the text, but to let historical and literary concerns guide this explicitly reader-orientated approach, which seeks to speak to a specific theological agenda.

Unlike the wisdom literature in the Old Testament, the book of Daniel does not provide overt formulas for a fulfilling life. In the aftermath of a horrific

persecution suffered by the Jewish community in Jerusalem during the fourth decade of the 2nd century BCE, the life envisaged by the book is rather one tainted by turmoil and an uncertain future. The lifestyle this book promulgates is one that finds comfort in the theology of old, as propagated by the prophets and the law. Although in the past, at the time of the persecution, their quietist adherence to these voices of old has led to life-threatening and even deadly consequences, the theological development internalised by this group is that there is a reality of another life beyond the grave. This theological leap not only affirms life in the present, but more specifically, also into the future.

Life in Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles

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■ Introduction

In this chapter the books First and Second Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah will be treated as a loose unity. In terms of their literary origins it may be best to view Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah as 'two different works by two different authors' (Japhet 1993:4; however, cf. Blenkinsopp 1988:47–54). If one accepts that Ezra-Nehemiah preceded Chronicles, while the books have much in common, it seems logical that Ezra-Nehemiah went through a 'Chronistic editing', as argued by Witte (2007:506). His view is that a pre-chronistic Ezra-Nehemiah composition was later edited secondarily by a Chronistic editor. Thus, at a later *Redaktionsgeschtliche* level, it is possible to recognise the model of a Chronistic History (Witte 2007:508). The Chronistic History is a post-exilic history dealing with events from Adam (1 Chr 1:1) to the completion of the second temple (Ezr 6:13–18) and the rebuilding of the walls of the city during the Persian Period (Neh 12:27) (Braun 1986:xviii–xix; Blenkinsopp 1988:47–54; Van Dyk 1987:77–82; slightly different Collins 2004:428).

Problems abound regarding unity within the four books, their sources, their coherence, their authorship and their canonicity. In the canonical order of the 'Writings', the third section of the Hebrew Bible, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles are included as the closing collection at the end of the Hebrew Bible. Each of these issues would justify extensive research and the traces of such research are to be found in scholarly literature.

In early Christian tradition, the books of the Chronistic History were often approached with scepticism, as they were interpreted as the earliest representations of legalistic Judaism, known from the New Testament as the Pharisaic movement. In practical terms, this resulted in a situation where the books of the Chronistic History were largely ignored. Roubos (1983:10) remarks on the paucity of sermons on 1 and 2 Chronicles in the series Postille, sermon suggestions published annually for many years in the Netherlands. Through a strange turn of events 1 Chronicles appeared on the horizon of many Christians with a flood of attention given to the 'Prayer of Jabez' in 1 Chronicles 4:9–10 (Wilkinson 2000).

The question of a Theology of Life in general and specific references to terminology reflective of life and living in the Chronistic books, draws the reader's attention to another peculiarity in these books: the paucity of words derived from חַי [life] and חָיָה [live]. Gerlemann (1971:n.p.) aptly remarks: '*Auffällig is das fehlen von ḥajjim in Chr/Esr/Neh*' – Noticable is the absence of ḥajjim in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah.

However, there is another side to the issue of life in the Chronistic History. The two books of Chronicles commence with a seemingly endless list of תולדות [generations] in 1 Chronicles 1–9 (Oeming 1990). Life through the ages forms the backbone of these two books and the post-exilic historical representation is a gaze at la longue durée of the history of Judah, often referred to as Israel, with YHWH, the God of Israel (Braun 1986:xxxv–xxxvii; Myers 1965:XIX–XL). Also, Ezra and Nehemiah are deeply interested in the lives of the Judahite families and this is the guideline for this chapter on a theology of life in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah.

■ Occurrences of חיה in 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah

To substantiate the remark by Gerlemann (1971), the occurrence of חיה related words (חיה, חַי, חיה subst., מחיה derivative) in 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah can be seen in Table 13.1 to Table 13.4 (based on Beal & Banks 1986:330–384; eds. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:291–295; Mandelkern 1971:385–389; text employed is that of the BHS – Rudolph 1975).

TABLE 13.1: The occurrence of חיה related words in 1 Chronicles.

חיה related words	Number of occurrences	Verses in 1 Chronicles
חיה	1x	Verb: 11:8 Pi

TABLE 13.2: The occurrence of חיה related words in 2 Chronicles.

חיה related words	Number of occurrences	Verses in 2 Chronicles
חיה	2x	Verb: 23:11 Qal; 25:25 Qal
חַי	4x	6:31 pl.; 10:6 s.; 18:13 s.; 25:12 pl.
חיה	1x	25:18
מחיה	1x	14:12

TABLE 13.3: The occurrence of חיה related words in Ezra.

חיה related words	Number of occurrences	Verses in Ezra
מחיה	2x	9:8; 9:9

TABLE 13.4: The occurrence of היה related words in Nehemiah.

חיה related words	Number of occurrences	Verses in Nehemiah
חיה	6x	Verb: 2:3 Qal; 3:34 Pi; 5:2 Qal; 6:11 Qal; 9:6 Pi; 9:29 Qal

■ Discussion of חיה terminology

These verses will be discussed individually. Not every case of a חיה derived word can result in theologising, but it is worthwhile to take note of all cases.

■ 1 Chronicles
□ 1 Chronicles 11:8

'And he built the city all around from the Millo in complete circuit, and Joab *repaired* the rest of the city'. (ESV)

יחיה (Pi impf 3 m of חיה, preserve, revive, give life, repair) has no particular theological impact.

■ 2 Chronicles
□ 2 Chronicles 6:31

Verse 31 is one verse in a section (vv. 28–31) on natural and other afflictions in King Solomon's prayer of dedication. The prayer (2 Chr 6:12–42) very closely resembles the prayer in 1 Kings 8:22–53 (ESV) and is quoted from there: '[…]

that they may fear you and walk in your ways all the days that they *live* in the land that you gave to our fathers'.

חיים (Pl of חי, alive, living). The phrase resembles the paraenetic style in Deuteronomy 4:1, 5:16, 6:12. In an unusual style it is here directed to God (Japhet 1993:597). Theologically this links directly with the Deuteronomic idea of living in (on the face of) the promised land as part of the covenantal relationship between YHWH and the fathers.

☐ 2 Chronicles 10:6

> Then King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, who had stood before Solomon his father while he was yet alive, saying, 'How would you advise me to answer this people?'. (2 Chr 10:6; [ESV])

חי ([sing], of חי [alive/living]) serves as a temporal reference to the time when King Solomon was still alive. It simply reflects the fact that Solomon has already died.

☐ 2 Chronicles 14:12

> Asa and the people who were with him pursued them as far as Gerar, and the Ethiopians fell until none remained alive, for they were broken before the LORD and his army. The men of Judah carried away very much spoil. (2 Chr 14:13; [ESV])

מחיה [living being] has no specific theological meaning, except that the Cushites (Ethiopians – ESV) could not survive the onslaught of the Lord and his army, in the form of King Asa of Judah and his army. Japhet (1993:712) aptly remarks: 'The message could not be more clearly brought home: "reliance on God results in victory"'.

☐ 2 Chronicles 18:13

But Micaiah said, '*As the Lord lives*, what my God says, that I will speak' (2 Chr 18:13; [ESV]).

חי יהוה is an oath formula – as true as YHWH is alive. Theologically, it is reflective of an understanding of truth and how God guarantees truth (Roubos 1972:180).

☐ 2 Chronicles 23:11

> Then they brought out the king's son and put the crown on him and gave him the testimony. And they proclaimed him king, and Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and they said, 'Long *live* the king'. (2 Chr 23:11; [ESV])

יחי (המלך) (Qal 3 m s jussive). A set formula 'May the king live!' (classical *vivat rex!*) occurs seven times in the Deuteronomistic History, but only once in Chronicles (eds. Koehler & Baumgartner 1958:292). The kingship in Judah was part of life before YHWH and YHWH's promise to David of a dynasty (Roubos 1972:214).

□ 2 Chronicles 25:12

> The men of Judah captured another 10 000 *alive* and took them to the top of a rock and threw them down from the top of the rock, and they were all dashed to pieces. (2 Chr 25:12; [ESV])

חיים (pl. of חי, alive, living). Noun referring to living enemies captured by the Judeans in a dramatically elaborated Chronistic version of the events (Dillard 1987:199–200; Japhet 1993:864–865).

□ 2 Chronicles 25:18

> And Joash the king of Israel sent word to Amaziah king of Judah, 'A thistle on Lebanon sent to a cedar on Lebanon, saying, "Give your daughter to my son for a wife", and a wild beast of Lebanon passed by and trampled down the thistle. […]' (2 Chr 25:28; [ESV])

חית (cs singular, wild animal) in the combination חית השדה refers to a wild animal in a fable that King Jehoash of Israel used. It has no impact on a theological understanding of life as such (Japhet 1993:868).

□ 2 Chronicles 25:25

'Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, *lived* 15 years after the death of Joash the son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel'. (2 Chr 25:25; [ESV])

ויחי (waw consecutive with Qal 3 m s of חיה, live). A temporal indication of the duration of Amaziah's life and reign, after he was humiliated by Jehoash (Japhet 1993:871).

■ Ezra
□ Ezra 9:8

> But now for a brief moment favour has been shown by the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant and to give us a secure hold within his holy place, that our God may brighten our eyes and grant us a little *reviving* in our slavery. (Ez 9:8; [ESV])

מחיה ([reviving], in the sense of preservation of life). In his prayer of confession, Ezra confesses that YHWH has shown his people some grace, by reviving them in their bondage as slaves. Williamson (1985:135) describes it as 'expressions of the gracious gifts of God to the community'.

☐ Ezra 9:9

For we are slaves. Yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some *reviving* to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem. (Ez 9:9; [ESV])

מחיה ([reviving], in the sense of preservation of life). In his prayer of confession, Ezra also indicates that YHWH has not forsaken Judah, but that he granted them 'life' to rebuild the temple and the city.

■ Nehemiah

☐ Nehemiah 2:3

I said to the king, 'Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my father's graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?'. (Neh 2:3; [ESV])

יחי (Qal 3 m s of חיה, live, jussive in meaning [Beal & Banks 1986:376]). Nehemiah respectfully addresses the Persian king, Artaxerxes, by wishing him eternal life (Williamson 1985:179). This is an introductory formula before he spells out the situation in Judah that causes him so much grief (Blenkinsopp 1988:214). In this context, life does not have a deeper theological meaning, but it represents honour.

☐ Nehemiah 3:34

And he said in the presence of his brothers and of the army of Samaria, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?'. (Neh 3:34; [ESV])

היחיו (Pi 3 m pl imperf חיה preserve, revive). These are denigrating words of Sanballat, while he mocks the Judeans for (re)using burned stones for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. According to Sanballat, it is as if they try to dig out and make the stones useful ('revive') (cf. Williamson 1985:214).

☐ Nehemiah 5:2

'For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep *alive*"'. (Neh 5:2; [ESV])

ונחיה (Qal 1 pl חיה live, in cohortative sense). Some Judeans feared that they might starve because of a lack of food and being exposed to usury by their fellow Judeans. The poor were exposed to large-scale usury and feared loss of land, children and freedom (cf. Williamson 1985:237). Nehemiah realised that it is an untenable situation before God and pleaded with the wealthy to end these practices.

☐ Nehemiah 6:11

'But I said, "Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I go into the temple and *live*? I will not go in"'. (Neh 6:11; [ESV])

וחי (waw consecutive + Qal 3 m s חיה, live). Nehemiah was not a priest and he realised that he was being tricked by Shemaiah to go into the temple (Blenkinsopp 1988:270). According to Numbers 18:7, the sanctuary was off bounds for a layman 'and any outsider who comes near shall be put to death'. Nehemiah knew that he would not enter the temple and leave unscathed. The holiness of the sanctuary – in this case the temple – was guaranteed by God. Therefore, Nehemiah had no intention to put his life at risk for a risqué plan such as that of the pseudo-prophet Shemaiah (Van den Born 1960:98).

☐ Nehemiah 9:6

You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you *preserve* all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. (Neh 9:6; [ESV])

מחיה (Pi participium m s חיה, preserve, revive, give life). This participial construction occurs in a Levitical poem of confession of sins. The opening stanza contains images and terminology known from creation theology. YHWH is exalted as the creator of heavens, earth and the seas and he gives life to all of creation (Blenkinsopp 1988:270).

☐ Nehemiah 9:29

And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall *live* by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. (Neh 9:29; [ESV])

ויחיה (waw consecutive Qal 3 m s of חיה, live). This verbal construction is also part of the Levitical poem of confession of sins. In a historical recollection the poet recollects Israel's disobedience to God and his prophets, over the ages. They were admonished to turn back to the law, but they did not listen and 'sinned against your rules'. Then, with reference to the ordinances of God, follows the remark that 'if a person does them, he shall live by them'. One hears in this passage Deuteronomic ideas, and the law stands central, 'virtually alongside God himself. To reject the one is to reject the other' (Williamson 1985:316).

Life sprouts from obedience to the laws of God. This is a central theological understanding in the books of the Chronicler.

■ Theology through life histories: תולדות in 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah

One of the most characteristic aspects of Chronicles is the extensive lists of family histories and descendants in 1 Chronicles 1–9 (Schreiner 2006:583). These תולדות may seem to be endless lists of names, but among these vertical and horizontal lines of descent and family relationships one finds living people and their genealogies. Oeming (1990:35–36) discusses these תולדות in terms of their function and significance. They have an impact on law, politics, sociology, history, psychology and religion.

The aspects of history and religion are significant for our understanding of a Theology of Life.

The significance for history lies in the historiographical material encapsulated within the genealogies. Not only recollections from earlier generations are reflected in genealogies, but the reader also gets an impression of the ideology and self-understanding of the genealogist. By mentioning hundreds of names in 1 Chronicles 1–9, the author takes the reader through hundreds of years of history. He commences with Adam, at the perceived onset of history (1 Chr 1:1), continues through the patriarchal narratives (1 Chr 1:28–54), the 12 sons of Jacob (starting with Judah [1 Chr 2:1–8] and including the family of David [1 Chr 2:9–3:24] and concludes with Benjamin [1 Chr 8:1–32], with a genealogy of Saul [1 Chr 8:33–40]), as well as the priestly line through Levi in the centre (1 Chr 6:1–81). The final chapter of this genealogical prelude (Schreiner 2006:583) to the rest of Chronicles consists of the names of returning and settled priests, Levites and temple servants in Jerusalem, called 'Israel' (1 Chr 9:1–34) and a final section on Saul (1 Chr 9:35–44). These lists are investigated from an archaeological angle by Finkelstein (2012:65–83).

Following the prelude, a narrative history that fills the rest of 1 and 2 Chronicles, commences with the death of Saul (1 Chr 10:1–14) and continues immediately with the rise to kingship by David (1 Chr 11).

The significance of the genealogies for religion lies in aspects such as election (Oeming 1990:36). God is presented to be involved in all historical events and a significant role played by God was the election and rejection of certain families and individuals. Through the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1–9 'theological accents (are established) that help determine the historical account that follows' (Schreiner 2006:583).

Being 'the son of' a father or 'the father of' a son in a genealogical list implies life and continuation of life (Haag 1972:673). This is of theological significance even though the terminology does not explicitly refer to life or being alive. The noun בן (singular 338x, plural 370x) abounds in 1 Chronicles, the most numerous of any book in the Old Testament (Kühlewein 1971:316–317).

Post-exilic Israel, presented as ‭(כל ה)קהל‬ [all the congregation], represents the Jewish cult community (Müller 1976:617; Roubos 1972:191), well-organised by priests, as well as the non-priestly Levites and other officials, such as singers and gate-keepers (Japhet 1993:45).

■ Conclusion

While 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah are not the richest sources of ‭חיה‬ derived vocabulary, the words do occur sporadically. They do not set a theological trend in the sense that one would say life is a central theological concept in the books, compared to books such as Deuteronomy and Ezekiel where the various terms relating to life are indicative of theological *Leitmotiven*.

In 1 Chronicles theologically laden derivatives of ‭חיה‬ are absent (except for a city that is brought to life – 1 Chr 11:8). Meanwhile, life pervades the lists of 1 Chronicles 1–9 and behind the scenes YHWH is the director of history.

In 2 Chronicles eight ‭חיה‬ derived words are present. They can be listed as follows:

- One reference to Deuteronomic thinking of life in the promised (and given) land, in a verbatim quote of Solomon's prayer from 1 Kings 8 (2 Chr 6:31). This reference is of theological significance.
- Four references to natural life (2 Chr 10:6; 14:12 [BHS; 14:13 ESV]; 25:12,25). The second and third occurrences of natural life, are warfare related, and these lives were lost. The first and fourth occurrences are related to kings. With reference to Solomon it is a neutral temporal indication that he was still alive. With reference to Amaziah the issue is that he lived on after the death of his Israelite antagonist.
- Two set formulas: an oath formula with reference to YHWH (2 Chr 18:13) and the well-known exclamation at the enthronement of a king (2 Chr 23:11). The first is born out of certainty, the second is a prayer and exclamation.
- One reference to wild animals (2 Chr 25:18), with no theological relevance.

In Ezra 9:8 and 9:9 a derivative of ‭חיה‬ is repeated as part of Ezra's prayer of confession on behalf of the people of Judah. It refers to 'YHWH our God' who acts on Judah's behalf.

In Nehemiah six ‭חיה‬ derived words were detected:

- The first is a set formula to address the Persian king (Neh 2:3).
- The second reference in Nehemiah 3:34 (BHS) (4:2; [ESV]) refers denigratingly to the reuse of dumped rocks as 'revived' building stones.
- Four ‭חיה‬ derived words are references to aspects of natural life. One is a simple plea for food in order to survive (Neh 5:2), but it leads to a

reinterpretation of Judean identity. Two references come from a Levitical poem of confession of sin: Nehemiah 9:6 in terms of creation theology and Nehemiah 9:29 with reference to the law of God. In the fourth case, Nehemiah is in interaction with an antagonist, the false prophet Shemaiah (Neh 6:11).

The very large component of genealogies and family lists does constitute a different angle on the study of life in 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. The תולדות emphasise the ongoing process of subsequent generations, since times immemorial, to the days of the authors' writing. Life through the ages connects the contemporaries of the Chronist to the first humans, the patriarchs, the tribes of Israel, the royal histories, the exile and post-exilic Israel, (כל ה)קהל [all the congregation of the Jewish cult community], well-organised by priests, Levites and other officials.

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Chapter 13

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Index

Much has been published on what Scripture teaches about life and death. To date, however, no comprehensive biblical theology in which the concept of life is traced throughout the different books and corpora of the Old and New Testament has been published. It is this lacuna that the current publication aims to fill, assuming that such an approach can provide a valuable contribution to the theological discourse on life and related concepts. The primary aim of this publication is to give an indication of the different nuances of the concept of life in the various books and corpora of the Old and New Testament by providing the reader with a book-by-book overview of the concept of life in Scripture. The secondary aim is to give an indication of the overall use and function of the concept of life in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Scripture as a whole. The latter is provided by using the findings of the book-by-book overview of the concept of life in Scripture to draw the lines together.

◆

It is an exciting endeavor to write a biblical theology that encompasses the message of both the Old and New Testament. The editors of *A Biblical Theology of Life* have succeeded in involving a broad team of specialists in this comprehensive project, which will consist of two parts. The choice of 'life' as the guiding theme was a happy one, on the one hand, because no exhaustive study is available on this subject yet, and on the other hand because 'life' is indeed a central notion that plays an important role in almost all biblical books. Further elaboration of this theme shows that other core theological themes also come into play automatically. It can be argued that, in a sense, 'life' provides a better perspective as an organizing principle for writing a biblical theology than the well-known notions of covenant, communion or kingdom of God. In many chapters, the expertise of the contributors guarantees a relevant and scientifically up-to-date discussion of the data. The methodology followed is synchronic-canonical, but valuable are also the hermeneutical and historical questions addressed. The whole offers a fascinating palette, with the importance of the theme of life in the Old Testament becoming increasingly clear as it goes along.

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