

# New Testament Life and Times

## The Resurrection of the Son of God --

12 – Greco-Roman and Jewish Beliefs

13 – Paul's Understanding <no time>

14 – As told by the Evangelists <no time>

**Leander Church of Christ**

**December 20, 2020**

**Notes available from <https://ClassNotes.LeanderChurch.org>**

# Short Video Clips (from last class)

3.0 [Chosen-Scene S1E7 Jesus calls the misfit tax collector 02m40s](#) – (12/13/2020)

1.0 [Chosen-Scene S1E3 MyFamilyIsNotWealthy 01m01s](#)

3.0 [Chosen-Scene S1E6 LeperHealed 02m18s](#)

2.0 [Chosen-Scene S1E7 Nicodemus Born Again 01m19s](#)

**\*\*\* LONG STORY <??>**

4.0 [Chosen-Scene S1E8 IAmHe\(SamaritanWoman\) 03m47s](#)

## Online Versions –

3.0 [Chosen-Scene S1E7 Jesus calls the misfit tax collector 02m40s](#)

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# GOOGLE: The Chosen Christmas Special

## YouTube: Christmas With The Chosen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5ftnTK9-3w>

[Sample 1 minute \(12/20/2020\)](#)



# Extra Credit ... (Source: *Theogony of Hesiod*)

- Uranus/Gaia (Primordial Sky and Earth)
  - Children: Cronus/Rhea + 10 siblings (“Titans,” including Prometheus and Atlas)
  - Their children: Zeus, Poseidon, HADES, Hestia, Demeter, Hera
  - Zeus and siblings wrested control from Cronus and banished the [losing] Titans to **TARTARUS**.
- Roman names
  - Zeus became Jupiter
  - Poseidon became Neptune
  - Hades became Pluto

# NTiiW - Resurrection in Greco-Roman and Jewish Thought

## Three representative diverse views:

1. Once a man has died, and the dust has soaked up his blood, there is no resurrection.
2. While the pyre was burning, it is said that a cloud passed under Hercules and with a peal of thunder wafted him up to heaven.
3. You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws.

# NTiiW - Resurrection in Greco-Roman and Jewish Thought (2)

Three representative diverse views: (stated differently)

1. DEATH IS PERMANENT.

Theater – Aescylus' play *Eumenides*, 647-8

2. HEROES GET TRANSLATED INTO HEAVEN WITHOUT DYING.

Literary – Apollodorus *The Library* 2.7.7

3. THE FAITHFUL WHO DIE ARE RETURNED BACK TO LIFE.

Apocrypha – 2 Macc. 7.9

# Hercules' Apotheosis



# Greco-Roman Beliefs – Jesus' +/- 250 years

- **Witless shadows in a murky world**

- The ancient Greek author **Homer**, whose significance for antiquity is perhaps akin to that of the **King James Bible** and **Shakespeare** in our own day, provides a window on ancient views of life after death.
- The dead become **shades** (*skiai*), **ghosts** (*psychai*), or **phantoms** (*eidola*). They are certainly not fully human beings. They may sometimes look like them; but the appearance is deceptive, since one cannot grasp them physically.
- Theirs is a shadowy and wispy existence in an underworld abode, even though they may occasionally appear to the living.
- The inhabitants of Hades remain essentially **subhuman** and **without hope**.

## Greco-Roman Beliefs – Jesus' +/- 250 years (2)

If **Homer functioned as the Old Testament** for the Hellenistic world—which by the first century included the entire middle east—its New Testament was unquestionably Plato. In contrast to Homer, the Greek philosopher Plato had a very different conception of human existence, its place in the cosmos, and the post-mortem destiny of the individual.

# Greco-Roman Beliefs – Jesus' +/- 250 years (3)

Plato believed that the essence of a human being was a non-material soul; it was to be cultivated in the present, both for its own sake and because its future happiness would depend upon such cultivation. The soul, being immortal, existed before the body, and would continue to exist after the body had gone.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of Plato for the later and wider world into which there burst the phenomenon we know as Christianity. For the Roman author Seneca, the immortal human soul had come from beyond this world—from among the stars, in fact—and would make its way back there. Though one might hold that it simply disappeared, it is more likely that it would go to be with the gods.

Platonic thought provided the tectonic plates for much Christian thought well into the middle ages. The second-century Christian apologist, Justin, was an eager Platonist. The second-century 'heretic' Marcion was well and truly steeped in Platonic ideas, regarding the human body as a 'sack of excrement' unfit for God to incarnate himself in, with the corollary that salvation must mean deliverance of the soul from this body, rather than the body's resurrection.

Possibility of the dead crossing back into land of living...

## Necromancy – communication with the departed

\*\*\* But the dead remained dead, not coming “back to life”

## Returns from the underworld

1. Odysseus visited Hades and returned (but he wasn't dead)

He visited the ghost of Hercules, even though the “real” Hercules was feasting with the immortal gods, married to Hebe!

2. Intelligent pagans contemporary with early Christianity knew about such stories, and dismissed them as mythic fictions.

# Possibility of the dead crossing back into land of living... (2)

1. Necromancy
2. Returns from the underworld

## 3. Metempsychosis – reincarnation of souls

The classic statement of this is found in **Plato**. His basic scheme is reasonably straightforward: after death, the souls of all humans wait for a period, whereupon they are given the choice of what sort of creatures they will become in their next existence (such as a swan, a lion, an eagle, or indeed another human). The souls then proceed through the Plain of Oblivion, drink from the River of Forgetfulness, and so pass into their next existence, unaware of who they have been, or even that they have been anything at all.

## Possibility of the dead crossing back into land of living... (3)

From Plato's point of view, to come back into this life at all is clearly to have failed in the soul's ultimate destination. It is to return to jail.

**By contrast, for believers in resurrection—that is, many Jews and virtually all early Christians—the new embodied life is to be looked forward to and celebrated.**

Homer's basic rule remained in force. Nobody was allowed to return from Hades and resume the life that he or she had once had.

# JEWISH VIEWS OF AFTERLIFE

GOAL – To explore views of the afterlife in the Old Testament and in a wider sample of post-biblical Jewish literature.

Grasping this will not only clarify the context of the resurrection narratives in the gospels, but will also explain what Paul meant when he said (quoting very early tradition) that the Messiah ‘was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures’.

It will also address the question of why Paul caused such a commotion by telling the Sadducees and Pharisees of the Sanhedrin, ‘I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.’

# JEWISH VIEWS OF AFTERLIFE (2)

The first thing we have to note is that resurrection makes only rare and late appearances in Israel's scriptures. **Hopes for the afterlife were at best on the periphery of the message of the Old Testament** as a whole.

One cohort of texts expresses a view, not all that different from that of Homer, that when a person 'slept with his or her ancestors' in death, such a person entered a post-mortem world of next to nothingness:

- Among the dead no one proclaims your name. Who praises you from [the] grave? Ps 6.5
- It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to the place of silence . . . Ps 115.17

# JEWISH VIEWS OF AFTERLIFE (3)

We find mention of Sheol, the Pit, the grave, and the dark. These almost interchangeable terms denote

- a place of gloom and despair
- a place where one can no longer enjoy life
- where the presence of YHWH himself is withdrawn.

As in Homer, there is no suggestion that the dead are happy there; it is a dark and gloomy world. Nothing much happens. It is not another form of real life, or an alternative world where things continue as normal.

Isaiah 14 offers a splendid depiction of the king of Babylon arriving in the underworld to join the erstwhile noble shades who are there already. In a passage worthy of Homer, he is grimly informed that things are very different down there.

# What is the oldest book of the Old Testament?

- JOB

- The exact date of the Book of Job is unknown, but there is strong evidence that Job lived in the 2nd millennium BCE and that the Book was written around that time as well. The events in the Book of Job are believed to have taken place before the time of Moses, possibly during the era of the Bible's Patriarchs.
- Additionally, the Book of Job is written differently from all the other books in the Bible and it also makes no reference to any other books or events in the Bible. This suggests that the events of Job took place long before those in the rest of the Bible. Job uses Arabic words and describes Arabic customs, opinions, and manners.

# JEWISH VIEWS OF AFTERLIFE (4)

JOB –

1. One who goes down to the grave does not return.
2. He breathes his last and is no more.
3. Until the heavens are no more, people will not awake.

# JEWISH VIEWS OF AFTERLIFE (5)

A cursory reading of Genesis 1—3 suggests that while humanity was not created **with** immortality, they were made **for** immortality, to know God and to enjoy him forever, to be his priest-kings over creation, and to rule with God over his world.

# JEWISH VIEWS OF AFTERLIFE (6)

Ps 49.14-15

Their forms will decay in the grave,  
far from their princely mansions.

But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead;  
he will surely take me to himself.

Where we find a glimmer of hope like this, it is based **not** on anything in the human make-up like an 'immortal soul', **but on YHWH and him alone**. Indeed, YHWH is the substance of the hope, not merely the ground: he himself is the 'portion', that is, the inheritance, of the righteous, devout Israelite.

# Post-Biblical Sources

Jews, it used to be said, believed in **resurrection**, while Greeks believed in **immortality**.

Like most half-truths, this one is as misleading as it is informative, if not more so.

If the Old Testament offers a spectrum of belief about life after death, the second-Temple period provides something more like an artist's palette: **dozens of options**, with different ways of describing similar positions and similar ways of describing different ones.

## Post-Biblical Sources (2)

Moving from pessimism to Platonism, many Jews assimilated to Hellenistic culture, and **absorbed the belief in the immortality of the soul.**

The great first-century **Jewish** exponent of a thorough Hellenistic viewpoint was the Alexandrian **philosopher Philo.**

It is beyond controversy that he taught the **immortality of the soul** rather than the **resurrection of the dead**. Philo believed the soul is immortal, or more accurately, the soul can be divided into several parts, one of which is immortal.

This **survey of Greco-Roman and Jewish views of the afterlife** is a vital backdrop for understanding the New Testament witness to resurrection. It allows us to:

1. **situate in the story of scripture** the words of Jesus that the ‘Son of Man . . . must be killed and after three days rise again’
2. to **note the radical claim** of Jesus in John’s gospel that ‘**I am the resurrection** and the life’
3. to **understand the significance** of Paul’s terse words that Jesus ‘was raised for our justification’
4. to **grasp the meaning** of John’s vision of the risen and exalted Jesus as saying, ‘**I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.**’

We need to be aware of the fears, hopes, and dreams about death and afterlife that swirl around in **our culture**, so that we can meaningfully address them with the good news about how God the father

**‘in his great mercy . . . has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade’.**

Class Ends Here [probably] 12/20/2020

## \*\*\* Chapter 13

### The Story of Easter according to the Apostle Paul (very abbreviated)

**CHAPTER AT A GLANCE** -- This chapter looks at the New Testament witness to Jesus' resurrection, majoring on Paul, to show its historical credibility and the theological meaning that was attributed to it. By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

1. describe Paul's testimony about the resurrection of Jesus
2. understand how Paul associates Jesus' resurrection with the future resurrection of believers
3. grasp some of the critical issues about the resurrection such as the resurrection of the body in 1 Corinthians 15
4. identify the importance of resurrection for Paul's theology as a whole.

# Paul's Timing

Paul's letters contain early traditions, almost creed-like fragments, that affirm two basic events: Jesus **died** and **rose**. Paul expounds this tradition frequently when explaining its pastoral and missional implications and warding off confusions.

He is in fact our most important early source for Jesus' resurrection and what it meant to his first followers. Paul was, after all, writing in the 40s and 50s, when (according to most scholars) the four gospels had not yet been produced,

# Heart of the Gospel

For Paul, the **resurrection** of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth is the **heart of the gospel**. It is the object of faith, the ground of justification, the basis for obedient Christian living, the motivation for unity, and, not least, the challenge to the principalities and powers. Moreover, there can be no question that when Paul speaks of resurrection in all these ways it is the bodily resurrection of Jesus he has in mind.

When Paul wants to ground his theological arguments and baptismal metaphors of new life on bedrock, it is to the literal, bodily resurrection that he returns. Something has happened as a result of which the cosmos itself is a different place. And when people are brought into that newness through baptism and faith they, too, become different people.

## \*\*\* Chapter 14

The Story of Easter according to the Evangelists (very abbreviated)

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# Closing (2)

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