

EVERYTHING TO KNOW ABOUT THE  
RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

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Advanced Apologetics

May 4, 2015

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## **Introduction**

Since the earliest humans can record, religions have attempted to answer the question of what happens to humans after death. This question has been answered by religion and philosophy throughout history, each religion having its own explanation for what happens to one consciousness after death. This is where different ideas of post mortem existence come from. Today Christianity, and other religions, claims the resurrection of the dead as the answer to what will happen to human's souls after death. The resurrection of the dead is one of the most important eschatological beliefs of multiple major religions. The basic doctrine for all of the religions that hold it is: at the end of the present world the dead will be resurrected back to life. While the requirements necessary for people to be resurrected differs depending on each religion, Christians tend to believe that all will be resurrected for the Day of Judgment, and those who believe in Christ will be rewarded with living for eternity. This is contrasted with the religion of Judaism, which believes that only the Jewish elect, God's chosen people, would be raised to join in God's kingdom<sup>1</sup>. This theology was never before believed by humans to be possible until Judaism. It was the ancient Jewish faith that first adopted this theology which later was also adopted or born into other religions. It is certain that the Jews were the first to create or believe in a resurrection of dead humans. Since Judaism is the oldest of all the religions that believe in Resurrection as an eschatological belief, it is important to track the history of this theology, and why the Jews came to believe in it, to better understand what this doctrine truly means not for the Jewish faith alone but to all faiths that claim this doctrine. The resurrection of the dead is an essential belief for multiple faiths, including Christianity, the focus of this thesis. This paper will explore every authoritative source, whether Jewish or Christian, that mentions the resurrection

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<sup>1</sup> Wisdom of Solomon

and it will serve to link the ancient Jewish resurrection with the Christian view of the resurrection. The resurrection of the dead is often forgotten as a major Christian dogma regarding the Christian faith. The resurrection of the dead is an unquestioned dogma to Christianity that is best understood in context of its long history, Jewish origins, and its place in God's great metanarrative.

## **Time Line of the Resurrection of the Dead**

The exact date that the resurrection of the dead became a common doctrine of eschatology in Judaism and its progression is not often studied. How and when did it become an important doctrine for the Jews as well as the Christians? When did this idea start and can it be traced through history? To properly study this topic the history must be traced from the first piece of evidence that can be found of it. It is evident that by the time of Christ the idea of resurrecting the dead was a common belief associated with Jewish eschatology.<sup>2</sup> The Pharisees, along with approximately ninety percent of practicing Jews, accepted this belief by the beginning of the first century<sup>3</sup>. Judaism was the only religion during this time to have faith in any resurrection of the dead. This belief differed from every other pagan religions in the first century. The religions of the Greeks and Egyptians believed in locations where the soul would be sent after death for an eternity with no hope of life, these locations were referred to as Hades and the Duat. Old Testament sources and the Torah show that early Jews believed in a similar place called Sheol.<sup>4</sup> Job mentions that to his knowledge, returning from Sheol is not possible. “As the cloud fades and vanishes, so he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.”<sup>5</sup> Yet it is unquestionable that Jewish sources from first century say the exact opposite about raising the dead to life<sup>6</sup>. When did this unprecedented doctrine appear in Christianity? To study a strictly Christian/ Jewish doctrine outside influences of these two religions must be removed. Therefore, only Jewish sources can be used to trace this doctrine from its beginning to its prominence in the first century.

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 23, Josephus antiquities

<sup>3</sup> Wright

<sup>4</sup> Job 7:9, 1 Samuel 2:6

<sup>5</sup> Job 7:9

<sup>6</sup> Wright

The first recordable mention of the resurrection of the dead in Jewish history is found in 1 Samuel 2:6. This is the passage of Hannah's prayer, which says: "The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up?" Hannah's prayer is dated back earlier than 1000 BC by multiple sources<sup>7</sup>. In 1 Samuel it is taken that Hannah is speaking of resurrection figuratively because there is absolutely no reason for her to believe in the dead resurrecting at this point, but by the time of Christ in the first century, the word 'resurrection' was being taken quite literally by the teachers of the law as well as the average Jew. Hannah was the mother of Samuel and she promised the Lord that if she was given a child she would dedicate her first born to Him. Samuel later became a great prophet who spoke God's will to His people. In context of the passage, this line is simply Hannah praising YHWH. This passage reveals nothing extremely import regarding the resurrection, however, it is clear Hannah believed that YHWH could raise one from the dead, providing the first mention of the resurrection in the history of Judaism. The song of Hannah introduced the resurrection theology eleven centuries before Christ, shifting the thought of the resurrection from a figurative idea to a realistic expectation. This allots over a thousand years for Jews to slowly believe that their God will one day resurrect the dead.

The next recorded, traceable thought of the resurrection of the dead is in the book of Psalms, which is dated possibly a hundred years or so after the song of Hannah. There are multiple chapters in Psalms that show the thought process of the ancient Jews, especially in a specific Psalms of Asaph, which includes various psalms written around 979 BC<sup>8</sup>. In Psalm 73 Asaph deals with the problem of good things happening to bad people and vice versa. "Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have

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<sup>7</sup> Wright, Josephus antiquities, Josephus war, Acts 23:7-9

<sup>8</sup> Allen

been stricken and rebuked every morning.”<sup>9</sup> The struggle of wicked people living prosperous life’s and dying with no punishment, and vice versa, is clearly a large problem. At the end of the chapter the psalmist has the faith to know that God is just and the wicked will not prosper<sup>10</sup>. How can one have this faith? Why does Asaph come to this conclusion? There are wicked people who die successful and wealthy, while there are righteous people who die torturous and unjust deaths. By this time Ancient Jews had not developed any concept or belief in heaven and hell, nor any post-mortem existence of the soul<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the resurrection of the dead would be a logical explanation to this problem in the Jewish faith. The story of Job is another example of the Jews’ problem with injustice. It is clear to the Jews that YHWH is righteous and just in every circumstance and for whatever reason. Therefore, Ancient Jews clearly saw a need for post-death justice in their worldview. When YHWH fulfills the covenant to Abraham, there had to be some way for those who had lived good life’s yet died unjustly to be reconciled in God’s kingdom. If YHWH is already proven to be just, then there must be an answer of reconciliation. The Jews later found the answer in the resurrection. God bringing those who died unjustly back to life to share in God’s promise to Abraham was the only way, as they saw it, for YHWH to keep both his promise to Abraham and maintains His righteousness. At this point there is not much evidence of belief in the dead resurrecting after David’s kingdom. It is only clear that unjust death was a problem the Jews knew needed an answer.

The next notable mention of the resurrection is in Isaiah, which takes place two centuries later in 725 B. C.<sup>12</sup> “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for Joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will

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<sup>9</sup> Psalms 73:12-14

<sup>10</sup> Psalms 73: 18-19

<sup>11</sup> Wright

<sup>12</sup> Allen

give birth to her dead.”<sup>13</sup> This is a notable mention of resurrection because of the time period Isaiah lived in. The time period is four centuries after the first mention of the resurrection and two centuries before the prophet's prophesy of the resurrection during the Jews exile. The preceding verse is a part of a song of praise to YHWH. That is useful as more evidence showing the continuing thought of the resurrection. There is no account in Isaiah of Isaiah being shown a future resurrection. Isaiah was given many prophesies and visions by YHWH and it seems clear that Isaiah is alluding to the dead awakening and praising YHWH. There is no knowledge of scriptural or traceable writings that give hard evidence for believing in a resurrection at this point, but Isaiah seems to have faith in it anyway. It is still a thought in the ancient Jewish mind that YHWH must do something, which may be the resurrection of the dead. The mentions of this theology have occurred three times in almost four hundred years at this point<sup>14</sup>. This was the foundation for the major Jewish doctrine of resurrection. After this point there is more solid evidence for why the Jews would start taking hold of this theology. However, even these first three vague points, each dating more than a hundred years apart, show the Jewish mindset towards the possible resurrection of the dead. When the Jews are taken into exile by Babylon for the first time; it is in Ezekiel<sup>15</sup> where the Jews faith in resurrection most certainly is affirmed.

And he said to me, “son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on

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<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 26:19

<sup>14</sup> 1 Samuel 2, Psalms of Asaph, Isaiah 26

<sup>15</sup> Ezekiel 37 (the valley of dry bones)



them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.”

Ezekiel was a simple priest in Israel that was suffering from the exile. After many prophecies towards the end of his career at the book of Ezekiel, he is given the vision of the valley of dry bones and YHWH’s promise to resurrect. This news of the coming resurrection was the best of all news to the exiled Jews. It was their hope of a future life, a promise that they were still His people and He would care for them and deliver them just as He did in Egypt. The suffering they were currently bearing was to be set right when they were resurrected. Even death could not hold them from their reward, the nations that had inflicted them would surely be punished and they would be rewarded<sup>16</sup>. There is no doubt that this is the main source of the resurrection theology. In verse two YHWH asks Ezekiel if dry bones can come life, when Ezekiel replies that they cannot, YHWH shows him a grotesque vision of bones being reanimated, covered in skin, and given the breath of life. Ezekiel’s vision in chapter 37 was taken by the Jews to believe the resurrection would happen at the return from exile<sup>17</sup>. There was already a long narrative of the Jewish heritage and its theological doctrine. The entire Jewish faith tracks back to Abraham, more specifically when God made his covenant with Abraham. When the Jews wandered in the desert for forty years and during the reign of Kings Saul, David, and Solomon, God’s spirit dwelled with the Jews in the Ark of the Covenant. After this, the Jews were exiled by God for their disobedience. The Jews long awaited the opportunity to return from exile back to the land promised to Abraham and rebuild the temple

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<sup>16</sup> Ezekiel 37:6

<sup>17</sup> Wright

so that God may dwell with them again<sup>18</sup>. This was the day of the Lord that they awaited from the covenant with Abraham, and they believed it would be fulfilled when they returned from exile. This is where the resurrection became an eschatological belief. Ezekiel is speaking as if those who suffered from the exile would be resurrected as God's elect when He established His kingdom on earth. Those who had previously suffered during exile but remain loyal to YHWH would be resurrected to rejoice in His new kingdom. Jews believed that when YHWH fulfilled His promise through the messiah, who was promised in Isaiah, He would resurrect the dead from Sheol, set the righteous apart from the wicked, and establish His kingdom among the righteous. This was a logical solution that would answer how the benevolent God the Jews worshipped would allow the wicked to prosper above the righteous. The Jews now awaited the Messiah to bring forth the resurrection, making the resurrection, the messiah, and the return from exile all one large eschatological event that ancient Jews accepted and awaited. This was the mindset of first century Jews and the belief that Jews held from the time of Ezekiel to the first century. The Jews ultimately came to the doctrine of resurrection to explain how God would fairly establish his kingdom when exile was ended.

Even more evidence for the Jews to believe in the resurrection arose in Daniel. Another prophesy, much like Ezekiel's, that was based on a vision given by God to Daniel assured him that the resurrection was yet to come. In Daniel 12, he writes about a vision he saw of the coming apocalypse, an event which looks very different from Ezekiel's but still holds same idea of the resurrection of the dead. In verse two Daniel says: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."<sup>19</sup>This verse, like in Ezekiel, is a report of a literal vision

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<sup>18</sup> Wright, JVG

<sup>19</sup> Daniel 12:2

Daniel had seen. Daniel saw all the things he writes in chapters eleven and twelve. He saw the day of the Lord, and YHWH told him that those who sleep in earth will live again. The Jews at the time would only take this as confirmation of what Ezekiel had already prophesied. Two Major Prophets prophesied the same resurrection in a time period of fifty years. If there was any previous doubt in the minds of the Jews, there now could be none. The Jews took prophesies seriously, especially those from Major Prophets whose divine speaking had already been proven true. This was clearly the quickest progression of the resurrection theology throughout the millennia of time if it being mentioned. Within less than a century, the hope of a future resurrection went from skeptical with little written evidence to a full expectancy of a literal resurrection. By the fall of Babylon in 539 B. C.<sup>20</sup> the Jews have every reason to believe in the resurrection. By this time The roots for the theology and need for it in an ancient Jewish worldview was clearly evident. Job and Asaph mention the need for post death justice, the idea that if YHWH is to remain just then he will provide justice in some way, even to those who have already passed. Ezekiel and Daniel further confirm that YHWH will resurrect the dead, giving life to bones and awakening those who sleep.<sup>21</sup> The Jews simply awaited ~~for~~ the day which this would happen, an event that was affirmed by Daniel to occur ~~be~~ in the final days. Thus the resurrection of the dead was confirmed as an eschatological belief associated with the messiah, the day of the Lord, and the return from exile. A further evidence of this theology imbedding itself into Jewish thought is accounts in the Mishnah Sanhedrin.

All Jews have a share in the World to Come, as it says, (Isaiah 60:21), “Thy people are

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ancient.eu/babylon>

<sup>21</sup> Daniel 12, Ezekiel 37

all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.” These have no share in the World to Come: One who says that [the belief of] resurrection of the dead is not from the Torah, [one who says that] that the Torah is not from Heaven, and an Apikoros. Rabbi Akiva says: also one who reads outside books, and one who whispers [an incantation] over a wound, saying,

(Exodus 15:26) “I will bring none of these diseases upon thee that I brought upon the Egyptians for I am the Lord that healeth thee.” Abba Shaul says, also one who utters the Divine name as it is spelled<sup>22</sup>

The Mishnah, the first book of the Talmud, is a collection of Jewish oral tradition from 600 BC to the fall of the temple in 70 AD and is considered authoritative to the Jewish faith. This account in the Mishnah shows more evidence of the advancing Jewish theology of the resurrection of the dead passed down through oral tradition. Chapter 10 in the Mishnah Sanhedrin tells of all of those who will share in the world to come, in YHWH’s kingdom. It is explicitly mentioned that those who do not believe in the resurrection of the dead will not share in the world to come. This view heavily sides with the Pharisees by the time of first century, but disagrees with the Sadducees. The pharisaical view of the resurrection became more prominent and popular than its adversaries, mainly the Sadducees, and the teachings of the Pharisees were the primary theological belief by the time the Mishnah was compiled. After Babylon’s destruction, the Jews were thrown right back in to captivity, as long as the temple had not been rebuilt in Jerusalem and Canaan was cleaned of its pagan impurities, YHWH could not reside in the temple again to end the exile. Only when these things came to pass and the Jews were free from their pagan oppressors would YHWH establish His kingdom and resurrect the dead. The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and proof of its eminence progressed even further during the Maccabean revolt which began in 167 B. C.<sup>23</sup> The revolt began in result to a Jewish priest who refused to worship Greek gods but instead continued to

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<sup>22</sup> Mishnah Sanhedrin 10. 1. 12

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/History/Maccabees.html>

worship YHWH despite Jewish practices being outlawed. The Maccabean army, was constructed and rebelled against the Seleucid Empire<sup>24</sup>. The text in 2 Maccabees chapter seven portrays seven brothers being killed one after another and is the proof of the serious belief these brothers had in the resurrection doctrine.

5 After the brother was maimed and utterly helpless, the king commanded him to be brought to the fire and fried alive. Although the smoke from the pan had spread widely, the brothers and their mother encouraged each other to die honorably, saying, 6 “The Lord God truly watches over us and will come to our aid. Moses testified to this in his song against them, saying, ‘God will have compassion on his servants. ’”[a]

7 After the first brother died in this manner, they led forward the second one with mockery. They ripped off the skin of his head along with the hair and demanded, “Will you eat this pork before every part of your body is punished limb by limb?”

8 But he answered in his native language, “Not at all.” Therefore, this brother also received in turn the same punishment as the first. 9 With his last breath he said, “You, who are marked out for vengeance, may take our present life, but the king of the universe for whose laws we die will resurrect us again to eternal life.”

10 After this, the third one was mocked. When it was demanded, he put out his tongue quickly, extended his hands courageously, 11 and stated with dignity, “I have received these limbs from heaven, and I give them up for the sake of God’s laws. But I hope to recover them from God again.” 12 The king and those with him marveled at the young man’s spirit, since he considered his agonies nothing.

13 After this one had died, the tormenters tortured the fourth brother as well. 14 When the end was approaching, he said, “Death at the hands of humans is preferable, since we look forward to the hope that God gives of being raised by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life.”

15 Immediately afterward, they led the fifth brother forward and began to torture him.

16 While looking at the king he said, “You, though human, have power among human beings and do what you want. But don’t think that God has abandoned our people. 17 Just wait and observe his great strength, when God will torture you and your children.”

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/History/Maccabees.html>

18 After him they brought forward the sixth brother. As he was about to die, he said, “Don’t deceive yourself in vain. We suffer these things because of our own sins against our God. Things worthy of wonder have happened. 19 But don’t think you will escape unpunished after trying to fight against God.”

20 The mother was particularly amazing and worthy of an honorable memory. She watched her seven sons die in the course of a single day but accepted it with a stout heart because of her hope in the Lord. 21 She encouraged each of them in their native language. Filled with noble thoughts, she fired up her womanly reasoning with manly courage, saying to them, 22 “I don’t know how you grew in my womb, nor did I grant the breath of life to you or arrange what makes you who you are. 23 For this reason, the creator of the world—who brought about the beginning of humanity and searched out the origin of all things—will again mercifully give you both spirit and life, since you disregard yourselves because of his laws.”

Four of the brothers and the mother of the brothers each allude to being raised again, being resurrected from their death that was now upon them. This not only proves that Jews in this time period had knowledge of the resurrection and believed in this theology, but they believed in it so adamantly that they bravely faced death and torture with complete confidence that their death was only temporary and not in vain. People do not die for what they do not believe in, as seen throughout history. This particular family in 2 Maccabees seven was being tortured and killed because of their refusal to abandon the Torah and eat pork<sup>25</sup>. This family was convinced that by refusing they were remaining faithful and obeying the law of their religion, they were in essence dying for their faith. They could have simply eaten the pork and surely been forgiven with a sacrifice of some type, but they do not. They chose to die instead of reject their traditions because of their faith and knowledge that they will be resurrected. YHWH would resurrect them, they knew this must be true as it is affirmed through the prophets and they are sure that God will reward their righteousness.<sup>26</sup> This is an example of how serious this belief had become sometime after Ezekiel and Daniel. When the resurrection

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<sup>25</sup> 2 Maccabees 7:1

<sup>26</sup> 2 Maccabees 7:6

was confirmed by the prophets the Jews quickly accepted it into their tradition and made it a central theme to their religion. They finally found hope in death as an answer to injustice. At the end of the Maccabean revolt the Jews marched home and purified the temple, hoping for the return of YHWH and the resurrection that had been promised by the prophets. However, they would have to wait; they were defeated and cast back into exile soon after their return to Palestine.

The next ancient Jewish evidence in chronological order is the Book of Wisdom, or the Wisdom of Solomon, which is considered second canonical and is a part of the Catholic Bible. The Wisdom of Solomon was originally considered by early scholars to be written by Solomon but the post classical Greek style of writing in Hebrew verse suggest it was written more towards first or second century B. C. Scholarly sources say this was most likely written in that time period because it is purposely written in Hebrew verses, but even though the source is most likely not written by Solomon, it is a respected scriptural or authoritative source by at least some of the Jewish and Christian communities. The Book of Wisdom chapter three not only addresses resurrection and the theology that was affirmed by Ezekiel and Daniel, but it also speaks of post mortem existence for the first time in Jewish history. Prior to this the only recorded knowledge of what happens to the souls of people when they die in Jewish history is the doctrine of the dead going to sheol. The simple belief was that souls went ‘down’, perhaps below the earth where there was no hope of return.<sup>27</sup> This was the only belief after death in Judaism until God spoke otherwise through Ezekiel and Daniel. This is the first mention of existence after death and immortality of the soul in the Book of Wisdom<sup>28</sup>.

1 But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment

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<sup>27</sup> Job 7:9

<sup>28</sup> Wisdom of Solomon 3

touch them.

2 In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die: and their departure is taken for misery,

3 And their going from us to be utter destruction: but they are in peace.

4 For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality.

5 And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for God proved them, and found them worthy for himself.

6 As gold in the furnace hath he tried them, and received them as a burnt offering.

7 And in the time of their visitation they shall shine, and run to and fro like sparks among the stubble.

8 They shall judge the nations, and have dominion over the people, and their Lord shall reign forever.

Again there is more evidence of the belief in resurrection a couple of centuries before Christ, by this time the doctrine of resurrection has fully developed ~~at this point~~.—Evidence from seven different sources within the millennia show the development of this belief that the dead will live again that was unprecedented in ancient society. The Jews came to believe this because of the need for justice by their God, especially during their punishment in exile. YHWH bringing the dead back to life to be judged as Daniel saw in his vision was the answer to the Jewish problem. It would fulfill the covenant of Abraham and bring YHWH back to the temple to live as, the Jews thought, it was supposed to be. This was confirmed by the prophets that the end would come and the resurrection would take place. The Book of Wisdom is again the first mention of immortality and what happens between death and resurrection, or at least what the Jewish belief at this time was of death and resurrection. According to the Wisdom of Solomon it is clear that the belief of righteous souls being cared for by God was taught at the time. This is different than the soul sleep-like theology seen in Sheol where the soul simply stays in an intermediate state. However, this supports the belief of the resurrection and the thought of YHWH taking care of the righteous when the day of the Lord comes to pass.



Now the time shifts from first century B. C. to the first century at the time Christ walked on earth, here it can be shown what a large part of Jewish eschatology and their theories concerning the resurrection of the dead had become. Jesus confirmed the resurrection many times to the Jewish people. In John 11:25 Jesus says: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live”. Jesus at this point is claiming to be the resurrection, or to have already been resurrected from the dead which will be largely dealt with in the next section. John 6:40 says: “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” Luke 14:14: “And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just”. John 6:54: “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day”. Jesus, whether the true messiah or not, taught these beliefs along with the majority of Jews at the time, as seen in the Mishnah and Bible<sup>29</sup>. The resurrection of the dead was a topic of great importance among the Jews as shown in Acts. “When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledged them all.)”<sup>30</sup>, by Mark<sup>31</sup>: “Then the Sadducees who say there is no resurrection...”, and by Flavius Josephus<sup>32</sup> This doctrine was a reason of division among the Jews. Like in anything, but in religion more so than anything else, for a group to divide over a belief shows the importance of that belief to the people. The historical evidence that these groups were divided over this issue shows the resurrections importance in the Jewish world at the time.

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<sup>29</sup> Mishnah Sanhedrin 10. 1. 12, John 6:54, Luke 14: 14

<sup>30</sup> Acts 23: 7-8

<sup>31</sup> Mark 12:18

<sup>32</sup> Antiquities 18. 1. 4-5

There is an abundance of sources explaining of the belief in the resurrection in first century; it was the beginning of this doctrine that is much harder to trace, but it is quite clear that the Pharisaic theology had a millennia to grow and develop into a serious doctrine of eschatology that was strongly relating to the return from exile. There are accounts of Jewish sources within that millennia showing the Jewish thought of resurrection and what was believed in each time period. The prophets affirmed the belief with their visions and connected it with the return from exile. This is every written mention yet to be found regarding the resurrection of the dead. The theology has been traced from eleventh century BC to the destruction of the temple in seventy AD. Doing so has provided the full history and thought of this important doctrine which can now be better understood modern put in historical context.

## **The Resurrection Doctrine**

Christianity started with the first resurrection of the dead, the resurrection of Christ. For this reason it should be the largest and most well-known of all Christian doctrine. However, it is currently not, as there is much debate over the topic in modern churches. The resurrection of Christ is well known and explored by the average Christian, but the implications for the future, the resurrection of all dead, and what happens to those alive when the resurrection takes place, are not typically explored. Had Christ not been raised, there would be no Christianity. Christians believe the resurrection of the Messiah was a part of the Jews' long awaited return from exile. The Jewish theology of the resurrection is the starting point for the Christian theology of the resurrection. The Jewish view of the resurrection and the Christian view are different, but the belief in the resurrection is the same.

### **Jewish Doctrine**

The theology of the Jewish resurrection was a very radical idea at the time it began. No other religion believed that the dead could become alive again, physically or spiritually. Even the multitude of pagan gods the Jews were surrounded by in ancient times were not believed to have the power to resurrect the dead back to life. Judaism was the first to believe that this would happen, and that it would be the largest and most important event in human history. The long story leading up to this event is intertwined with the history of Judaism. The Jewish faith begins with one man, one predecessor for an entire nation of people<sup>33</sup>; this man is Abraham. Abraham's story is well known and can be found in Genesis<sup>34</sup>, but the general story of the beginning of Judaism starts with Abraham being called by YHWH. YHWH made a covenant

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<sup>33</sup> Hebrews 11:12

<sup>34</sup> Genesis 12-25

that all people will be blessed through Abraham's offspring and the land of Canaan would belong to his people. Many years later the Israelites, the descendants of Abraham, were released from captivity in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. YHWH instructed Moses to build an Ark of the Covenant within which He would dwell, which was later kept in the temple. God always dwelled with His people in this way during the time of the sacrificial covenant, which would eventually be replaced with the new covenant. This is the covenant the Jews lived in with YHWH and with the covenant came the expectation that sacrifice was the only way to atone for their sin. Fast forward to Israel's first exile into Babylon: the Israelites know they have been punished for their sin and cast into exile by YHWH. Soon after, they awaited the promise of Ezekiel that YHWH's Kingdom would come when the Day of the Lord, or the Messiah, came. The Messiah would free the Israelites from exile and set up YHWH's Kingdom for eternity, fulfilling God's covenant with Abraham that God will be their God and the Israelites will live forever in Canaan, much like in King Solomon's kingdom. At the end of the exile YHWH would once again dwell in the temple like He did before, in the Ark of the Covenant. The Jews would finally have justice for serving God and prosper as His true people. Now the Jews faced the problem of what would become of those who suffered and died during the exile that would not be alive or able to take part in YHWH's great Kingdom. Also still there was a problem of those who prospered on earth living unjust lives, for how could justice be granted after death? Ezekiel and Daniel's visions provide the answers that when the Day of the Lord comes, YHWH will resurrect all those who had previously died. Those who were righteous in His eyes would be judged and rewarded with everlasting life on earth in the New Jerusalem and prosper in His new and everlasting Kingdom. Those who were found unrighteous in His eyes would be judged and not allowed part in His new kingdom<sup>35</sup>. The

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<sup>35</sup> Mishnah Sanhedrin 10

resurrection was the answer; YHWH would establish righteousness and all would be made just at the resurrection. All would be judged, however not all would take part in His kingdom. Some would be resurrected to new life in a perfect kingdom ordained by YHWH. While Others would not be given this opportunity because of their unrighteousness or wickedness. In this way YHWH would administer justice and those who were unrighteous would not live in His kingdom. This is the core Jewish doctrine of the resurrection, the belief the Jews had when Christ raised, and the belief the disciples, Paul, and other members of the early Church were accustomed to at the beginning of the Christian Church.

### Christian Doctrine

The resurrection is simply one of multiple Jewish doctrines that immediately became a part of Christianity at the beginning of the early church. The simple view of the resurrection in Judaism is that when the Messiah returns the Lord will resurrect the dead and judge all people. Those that are His people will be rewarded while those who are not will be punished. Christians adopted this theology but imposed some of their own views. Christians first believed that the Messiah had already come and established a New Covenant that ended the exile from God and allowed anyone willing to become one of God's chosen people to be resurrected one day. As stated in John<sup>36</sup> "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live". Jesus makes it clear that anyone who believed in Him could be resurrected. This disagrees with the Jewish theology that only Jews would be resurrected. This is one of the first signs of Christ's new covenant being granted to the gentiles as well as Jews. The resurrection as a Christian theology still held true to its Jewish roots, however, Christians believe that when the Messiah returns again, as he promised<sup>37</sup>, God will resurrect the dead and judgment will occur for

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<sup>36</sup> John 11:25

<sup>37</sup> John 14: 1-3

all. Evidence of Christ and Paul both believing this doctrine can be found in Matthew 25:46: “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life,” and in 1 Corinthians,<sup>38</sup> “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.” The Christian’s belief is very clear that Christ is the firstborn of all the dead<sup>39</sup>, clearly implying that more will be raised from the dead at the return of Christ, as seen in visions. Christ’s resurrection, the first of all who will be resurrected, can tell much about the coming resurrection. For instance, the gospels mention that Jesus was somewhat unrecognizable after resurrection in the gospels,<sup>40</sup> this seems to imply that He was given a newly resurrected body that looked different in some way. This led to the agreement that a new resurrection body was given after resurrection. The early church belief was strongly influenced by Paul, who endorsed the resurrection, like all Pharisees at that time<sup>41</sup>. He was, after all, trained as a Pharisee that strongly believed the first century Jewish doctrine of the resurrection. Thus Paul’s doctrine was formed with the complete knowledge of what the resurrection meant to first century Judaism. This only makes sense when understanding the full narrative of YHWH’s story, the story of His creation, His people’s exile because of sin and death, and His covenant to end that exile so that He and His people may be together again. To Christians this story also includes how God finally ended the exile by sacrificing His son, and how He will set everything straight, according to His justice, when the final days come by resurrecting the dead. When this narrative is understood, it is the only logical way for God to restore justice. There are those who died before the New Covenant, so God must, when He returns, resurrect the dead so that everyone can be given judgment and His people, no matter when they lived, will be given eternal life in His restored

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<sup>38</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:20

<sup>39</sup> Colossians 1:18

<sup>40</sup> Luke 24:16, Mark 16:12

<sup>41</sup> Wright, what Paul really said

Kingdom that will exist exactly as He originally intended His creation to live. Then His creation will once again walk with him as Adam and Eve did in the Garden. Not only Paul, but Jesus and the disciples believed the same thing, Jesus says in John “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live’”.<sup>42</sup> Christ also shows His belief in the resurrection saying: “For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”<sup>43</sup> In multiple other places Jesus directly speaks of the resurrection to come for those who believe in Him. Again Christ came to establish a new covenant and end the exile of sin and death. This covenant allowed anyone who believed in God to be a part of His kingdom, and many died believing in this truth that God will one day resurrect all of those who died and judge based on their life here on earth. Then God’s kingdom will be founded on earth for an eternity, and all will be according to what God intended at creation. This is the ultimate ending to the master plan God orchestrated from the beginning, and the resurrection plays a major role in the plot.

### The Ultimate Narrative

The Jews’ long narrative, beginning with YHWH’s covenant to Abraham, was misunderstood. The Jews knew they were being punished in exile and their exile would eventually end, however, they misunderstood their exile. They believed that being ruled by pagan countries was their punishment for the sins they had committed against YHWH, but YHWH was less interested in where they lived or who ruled them than the end of the exile. YHWH was separated from His people by sin and death since the Fall in Genesis 3. YHWH wished to dwell with his people as He did in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, however He could not because of sin. The Jews understood they had been separated from their God, but

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<sup>42</sup> John 11:25

<sup>43</sup> John 6:40

they believed this would end when they were no longer ruled by pagans and YHWH would dwell with them in a sacrificial covenant setting. First century Jews believed that YHWH would send the Messiah as political leader and warrior to free them from the exile of the pagan countries that had ruled them so they could establish a kingdom and a temple for Him to dwell in. The idea was that YHWH wanted them to live in the system and sacrificial covenant they had lived in since the time of King David and Solomon. The Jews believed this could only be achieved by the Messiah, who was prophesied to be from the line of David, rising up to defeat Rome and establish YHWH's Kingdom for Him to dwell in. Instead of YHWH sending the Messiah to free the Jews from Rome, He sent Christ to free the people of the world from sin and death, just as it was foretold in His covenant to Abraham. Christ died on the cross as a sacrifice for the world's sin, a sin that had not been atoned for since the Fall of man. Christ's sacrifice ended the exile of God's people from Him. They could now dwell with God more than they could before. The exile, after all, wasn't the Jews being banished from Palestine but God removing himself from the Jews because of their sin, which could not be atoned for until Christ. When Christ died and atoned for their sin as a sacrifice, they then had the ability to draw near once again to YHWH. The Jews knew that they had been exiled from God and that the exile would end when God dwelled with His people again. They assumed this would happen as it did in the temple and tabernacle. The Messiah would establish a Kingdom as David had. Then God would dwell in the temple, the dead would be resurrected, and YHWH would reign forever with the Jews as His chosen people. Until then, they would continue to offer sacrifices and commune with God through priests. God had a greater plan however, as Jesus prophesied that a new covenant would be set up for God to be with his people without the need for priest or a temple. This is why the curtain tore at Jesus' death, to show the new covenant Jesus was fulfilling and



the ability of God's people to commune with God themselves. The Jews wanted Christ to be a warrior that would fight off the pagans, instead they received a servant that defeated sin and death and formed a bridge for God to be with his people. This was the return from exile, the beginning of Christianity, and God's people could now be with Him again. The reason for distinction between Christianity and Judaism is the new covenant that Christ creates. The true return from exile happens at the resurrection of Christ, and while it still will be an eschatological event with Christ as the first to be resurrected, this was, the turning point in God's narrative and plan for His creation. Everything the Jews believed would happen when the Messiah came happened in an unexpected. This, more so than anything else, shook their ideas of the resurrection, for the Jews had awaited the resurrection like a child waits for Christmas. They longed for the moment when YHWH would resurrect the dead, uplift the righteous in his New Kingdom and condemn those who had prospered undeservingly. First century Jews expected to see the patriarchs- Abraham, Moses, Elijah- walking around rejoicing in the New Kingdom at the resurrection. Christians still do believe this will happen one day when the rest of the resurrection does take place. Judaism and Christianity hold the same central idea of the resurrection, that God will one day resurrect the dead to judge those who have died and punish some while rewarding others. The distinction between the two involves who Jesus was, whether or not He was truly the Messiah, the question of if people will be given a new resurrection body, and when the resurrection will happen. This is why Christianity is a fulfilled Judaism, any Jew who respects that Jesus is the Messiah who fulfilled what He was meant to do in an unexpected way believes exactly what Christians do, just as Paul and the disciples did. Jesus fulfilled the covenant YHWH gave Abraham, He fulfilled Judaism and began a new covenant which brought forth Christianity. However, there was almost no difference between the resurrection theologies; they both are eschatological

events, they both raise the dead to be judged, and God's people are considered righteous in both. God's people to the Jews is determined by lineage, but God's people according to Christians is anyone who believes. The theology remains the same because the narrative of both religions remains the same, the story through which God's will is made evident. The resurrection doctrine does not change from a Jewish doctrine to a Christian doctrine; it is simply put in a new praxis of the New Covenant. The Doctrine, both Jewish and Christian, is a part of one narrative of God's plan for His creation.

## **The Importance of the Resurrection Doctrine**

According the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, a number of dogmas exist outlining the Christian faith and what must be believed in order to be a Christian. There are other creeds with the same dogmas, but the Nicene is the only creed upon which all major Christian denominations have reached a consensus. One of the few major dogmas that each Christian denomination mentions as an unquestionable belief of Christianity is the Resurrection of the dead. However, Americanized Christianity knows very little, if any, about this major dogma. The importance of this theology is clearly crucial to Christian's faith, so why, then, is it ignored? The future of hope Christianity is in the Resurrection of the dead. It must be understood that Christians do not simply die and go to heaven or hell as presently believed by the majority of laymen in the church. Scriptural evidence<sup>44</sup> and historical background say that Christians will not live eternally in heaven, but eternally on earth in their current physical state with a different and better resurrected body. The Resurrection, to the Jews, was a theology that gave hope; it was the "happily ever after" to their horrible exile from God and all of the persecutions they faced from pagans. To Christians, the Resurrection bears the same message: hope.

### **Hope**

This hope was assured when the first Resurrection occurred with Christ, and sin and death were defeated. Now Christians could dwell with God and no longer fear the penalty they must face for their sin. Sin was atoned for, and Christians could now live with peace, knowing that death on earth was inevitable, but death of their soul was not to be feared because of Christ's sacrifice. For Christians, death now means nothing since physical death and removal from this earth is only temporary. The Resurrection places them right back on earth after a short time, and Christians' souls are resurrected with their new bodies, even though they never died. Practical

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<sup>44</sup> Revelation 1:18, Revelation 6: 10-11, and Revelation 20: 11-15

application of this would be: A Christian having the faith to endure a martyr's death for Christ. There is no need to fear dying on the earth, for the resurrection promises Christians will be brought back to life here on earth. Nothing can give greater reassurance to Christians facing persecution and death than the knowledge that death will only last for a short while before one is resurrected back on earth into God's perfect kingdom. The Resurrection is the hope for all Christians, and without the proper knowledge of the Resurrection, Christians will not know of the hope in store for them. The future for Christians and the eschatology of Christianity is different than what many laymen are taught. The Creed states: "We look for the Resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." It is easy to see what the early church believed; Christians' hope in the future was not dying so they may go to heaven, but being resurrected so they may live in the new world to come. The early church believed this because of the history of the Resurrection they knew at the time. The Resurrection is Christians' greatest hope; on the earth is where Christians hope to live eternally, not in some alternate universe where heaven exists independently of Earth. Here on earth is where the Resurrection and judgment will take place, and is where the righteous will live eternally in their resurrected bodies, with Christ. A correct view of the Resurrection is vital to the Christian faith. Without it, Christians simply cannot understand a major dogma of their own faith or their future and how to live their lives in the present. When Christians understand the difference between the belief of living eternally in heaven and God will bring His kingdom down to earth, it is understood that everything done in this life is much more important because death does not take one away from the earth forever. Death momentarily takes one off of the earth before he or she is resurrected back on Earth for either eternal dwelling with God or eternal punishment.

### Eschatology

Eschatology, the study of end times, is a highly debated topic among Christian scholars.

There are three different Christian views of the end of this world that all describe major events the Bible mentions. Almost every view works well with and accepts the correct resurrection doctrine. Each of these views debate over when the millennium spoken of in revelation and the Resurrection will happen in reference to the church age, tribulation, and the antichrist. None of these views agree on the order of these events except that the church age is currently happening and that the Resurrection has not happened yet. The Resurrection's eschatological value is unquestionable and is an important part of understanding the future for Christians. In 1 Corinthians<sup>45</sup>, Paul discusses what will happen to Christians in the future at the Resurrection

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

Christians will, at the end of this world, be resurrected to a new life and an eternal state in God's kingdom. This is the future for Christians no matter what eschatological view one holds. One eschatological doctrine that has become popular modernly but conflicts with the Resurrection, and may be reason for the ignorance of this important doctrine to the laymen of the Church, is the Rapture doctrine. The Rapture doctrine is very popular, possibly because of the promotion it has had through books and movies in the media world. The Rapture, in regard to escaping the tribulation as sometimes seen in a pre-millennial view, is in no way compatible with the Resurrection doctrine, which holds much more historical and scriptural evidence than the Rapture. The Rapture doctrine would make no sense with the Resurrection. Why would God take those who were alive off of the earth just so they could be put back on it? God's kingdom will be taken down to the earth regardless of any circumstance, so even if the

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<sup>45</sup> 1 Corinthians 15: 50-51

tribulation is yet to come on Earth, Christians could die in confidence that they would shortly be raised again into God's holy kingdom. What purpose could take the living Christians away from the earth serve? How would the rest of the population understand what would be happening? Death has already been conquered; no reason exists for God to have His people avoid death when they would only resurrect into a new body shortly after dying in the tribulation. Furthermore, if there is no tribulation to come, such as in a post-mill or amill view, then there would be even less reason for God to take all of His people away from the earth. God desires Christians to be a light and to spread His truth; His gospel does not change. With or without tribulation, there must be those to do work for God's kingdom and speak truth on the earth. The Rapture would go against everything God has been working for since Christ. God's people must be present to build God's kingdom, which will be fulfilled after the Resurrection.

#### The Resurrections Place in the Metta-Narrative

The Resurrection is probably most important when viewed as a vital piece of God's story. He has been working to perfect since Creation. God made His creation for Him to enjoy and to worship Him. Since Creation and the Fall, He orchestrated a plan to restore humanity back to where it was originally intended to be, with Him. This picture is seen in Genesis when Adam is walking in the garden with God. This is God's will, to restore humanity back to His side. In order to do this, God planned from the very beginning for man to fall and for Him to sacrifice His son so that humanity could be returned to His side. The Resurrection is an important part of this story of humanity returning to God. God wishes for each and every one of His creations to freely choose to dwell with Him. Many have chosen to serve God with the future hope of dwelling with Him one day. This hope would not exist were it not for the Resurrection. Thus, the Resurrection is one of the larger pieces of the puzzle humans can slowly see being put together by God. The Resurrection will join all of God's people together, no matter the time

period or covenant in which they lived. The Resurrection will be one of the final pieces to the long plan God set in motion at Genesis to be in perfect harmony with His creations.

The Resurrection is one of the most important doctrines to understand and to believe in as a Christian. This is why it is mentioned in the Nicene Creed and is major dogma of the Christian religion. Without the proper understanding and knowledge of the Resurrection, Christians will never comprehend the hope they have in the coming future and their place in God's kingdom, nor their future as Christians, the Resurrection's eschatological importance, God's beautiful plan for His creation, how He orchestrated every single move from the beginning, and how His perfect plan ends in eternity with Him. A proper view of the Resurrection shows the importance of all of these aspects and helps Christians better execute their job here on earth.

## Conclusion

In order for one to be a Christian they must believe in the resurrection of the dead, but to better understand their place in God's kingdom one needs to understand the implications of the resurrection, including What happened to Christ, what the Jews expected to happen, what will one day happen to Christians, and why as Christians there is hope in death. A proper view and understanding of the history of this theology and its Jewish origins are necessary to fully grasp all of these things. God clearly gave His prophets visions of the future resurrection to reassure His people that they had hope and justice would be administered. This shown through over seven different ancient sources that all perfectly matchup showing the progression of the theology throughout the ancient world. As well drawing conclusions to these different religions same doctrine and why the religions differ. The last section names the major importance of the doctrine to the Christian faith and why the doctrine must be understood to grasp one's place in God's kingdom. This paper serves as a tool to teach and explain the resurrection to any Christian lacking the basic knowledge and facts needed to better understand Christianity, Christ's resurrection, and Christian eschatology.



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