

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF BIBLICAL VIEWS  
ON THE GENERAL RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD**

by

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## ABSTRACT

The key to understanding the Apostolic view on the resurrection of the dead held by the Early Church lies in identifying the influences to views expressed in New Testament literature that developed during the intertestamental period. Eschatological expectations that developed during this period were, firstly, those that held, as expressed in Daniel, that the dead spend their time asleep in *Sheol* awaiting the physical resurrection of their flesh. Examples of this can be found in 1 Enoch (22:1-4,8-14; 93:15-17; 102: 5), The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs (Testament of Judah 25: 1,3-5; Benjamin 10: 6-9) and 2 Baruch (20:23-25; 50: 1-4). This idea was largely adopted by the Pharisees who believed that the souls of the dead sleep in the earth until the last day when the resurrection takes place (Whitkin 1994: The Pharisees). They believed that on being resurrected their souls would reanimate their decomposed bodies which would regain life and rise from the dead (Douglas 1962: 981; Whiston 1960: 376-377, 478 - Josephus Antiq. Book xvii 1:3; Wars. Book ii 8:14). Both the righteous and the wicked are judged. The righteous spend eternal life with God, whereas the souls of the unrighteous suffer eternally.

Secondly, there were those that believed in the resurrection or assumption of the soul on death, e.g., 1 Enoch (1:1-9; 98:7-12); The Testament of Moses (10:1-2, 7-10b); Jubilees (23:26-27, 29-31); 4 Maccabees (16:12-13) and the Psalms of Solomon (Ps. 2:30-35). Indications are that they did not believe in the resurrection of the flesh. This view was held by the Essenes who held to a 'realised eschatology' whereby they became part of the eternal assembly and experienced fellowship with the heavenlies on initiation into the

community (Charlesworth 1994: Vol. 1. p. 3,13 - 1QS. Col. 2. 24-25; Nickelsburg 1972: 148). They looked forward to their transition from the body of flesh, which they saw as a hindrance to experiencing the fullness of their blessed state already entered into (Nickelsburg 1972: 154-155).

At the birth of the Christian Church, Jews from different backgrounds and sects would have been birthed into the Church. This is evidenced in the different views on the resurrection of the dead portrayed in the New Testament. Firstly, a view emerges in the early Gospel accounts where Christ is attributed with propagating a view that the dead rise immediately on death to become like the angels and experience fellowship with God (Mt. 22:29-32; Mk. 12: 24-27; Lk. 20:34-38) (Hick 1976: 181-183; Charles 1963: 396-397). Christ speaks of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as though they were already resurrected (Hick 1976: 181-183). This belief appears to be echoed by the author of Revelation who speaks of the souls of Believers entering directly into heaven upon being martyred (Rev. 6:9-11; 7:9-17) (Caird 1966: 101-102, 254). Saints that are martyred and translated into heaven receive white robes indicating the receipt of glorified bodies (Caird 1966: 101-102, 254) (Rev. 7:9-17). This view does not see a general resurrection of dead bodies from tombs at the end of the age.

There were those who extended this belief to include an idea of a 'realized eschatology,' similar to that held by the Essenes (Nickelsberg 1972: 167-169), where Believers, on being initiated into the faith, are immediately transferred into the heavenlies. The introduction of this belief to the Christian Church appears to have developed in the

Jerusalem area where they adopted views expressed in the writings of Enoch (1 Enoch) and certain Essenic literature. Peter appears to echo Essenic concepts (Green 1968: 35-36; Allbright 1957: 2f; Harrison 1964: 81) and speaks of Believers having been transferred out of darkness into marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Peter's view on the destruction of heaven and earth by fire (2 Peter 3:10-13), his view on the incarceration of wicked angels (2 Peter 2:4) and the continued punishment of the wicked awaiting judgement (2 Peter 2:9) have Essenic parallels (1 Enoch 1:1-4, 6-7; 93:14-17; 10:11-14; Qumran – Column iv in the Hymns). Paul, after spending time with Peter and Mark (Cullman 1953: 70-152; 1 Clement 5,42,44), appears to have embraced the realised eschatology propagated by Peter. Paul's realised eschatology (Filson 1964: 336-340) is evidenced in his prison epistles where he speaks of Believers having already been raised up with Christ (Eph. 2:1-6; Col. 3:1) and being citizens of heaven (Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20). Indications are that the Believer is already spiritually resurrected in Christ. This state is similar to the state that the Essenes believed they entered into on being initiated into the Community (Bailey 1979: 82-85; Nickelsburg 1972: 148; Charlesworth 1994: Vol. 1. p. 3,13) (1QS. Col. 2. 24-25). Paul looks forward to his body being transformed to a body of glory (Phil. 3:20-21) and speaks of being transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of 'His beloved Son' (Col. 1:13). Similarly to 1 Enoch he speaks of the Believers being revealed with Christ when He is revealed in glory (Col. 3:4). Paul also speaks of Christ's return where the bodies of Believers who are alive on the earth will be transformed into glorious bodies similar to that held by Christ (Phil. 3:20-21).

The two views mentioned above do, however, see a resurrection, or relocation of souls at the end of the age. Revelation speaks of the second resurrection (20:11-15), which appears to be a resurrection of the wicked (Massyngberde Ford 1975: 359). It appears that on being judged the souls of the lost are either annihilated in the second death (Caird 1966: 260) or suffer eternally (Craig 1998: 191-201). Confusion arose during the intertestamental period regarding the severity and the finality of the punishment to be suffered by the wicked. Certain writings during this period allude to the wicked being totally annihilated on being judged (Nickelsburg 1972: 134) (Psalms of Solomon 3: 9-12; 13:11-12; 1 Enoch 10:11-14; 53: 1-2; 98: 6-11; 99:11; 108:1-3, 11-15;) whereas other writings allude to the eternal suffering of the wicked (4 Maccabees 13:13-18; 1 Enoch 21:7-10; 103:6-8). As 1 Enoch was compiled over a few centuries, views contained therein are not always constant (Black 1985: 8).

Thirdly, there are New Testament authors who held to a Pharisaic view on the resurrection of the dead. They, like the Pharisees, believed that the dead spend their time asleep in *Sheol* awaiting the resurrection of their fleshly bodies, i.e., the reanimation of their decomposed bodies (Douglas 1962: 981; Whiston 1960: 376-377, 478 - Josephus Antiq. Book xvii 1:3; Wars. Book ii 8:14). This is reflected in the early teachings of Paul (1 Thes. 4:13-18; 2 Thes. 2:1; 1 Cor. 15:1-58) (Charles 1963: 437-454), the Fourth Gospel (Jn. 5:28; 6: 38-40, 44,54) and a view held by the redactor of Matthew (27:51-53). This view holds that all souls, righteous and wicked, are raised at the end of the age to face judgement (Whiston 1960: 376-377, 478 - Josephus Antiq. Book xvii 1:3; Wars. Book ii 8:14). The Pharisees held that the righteous undergo a resurrection of their

decomposed bodies whereas only the souls of the wicked are raised on the last day (Whiston 1960: 478; Josephus Wars. Book ii 8:14). The righteous enter into eternal bliss whereas the wicked are condemned to eternal punishment (Whiston 1960: 478; Josephus Wars. Book ii 8:14).

It becomes apparent that the term 'resurrection,' the Greek *anastasis* (Green 1976: 912, 924), meaning, 'a raising up,' or 'rising,' (Thayer 1962: 41-42) came to signify various elements of what was eventually referred to as the 'resurrection.' This term is used by the Synoptic Gospels (Mt. 22:29-32; Mk. 12:24-27; Lk. 20:34-38) to refer to those who enter into eternal life on dying (Hick 1976: 181-183; Charles 1963: 395-400). The author of Revelation uses this term in reference to the resurrection of the souls of the righteous who enter heaven on dying (20:4-6) (Caird 1966: 254). This term is also used by those holding to the Pharisaic view in referring to the raising up of decomposed bodies of the dead at the end of the age (Douglas 1962: 981; Whiston 1960: 376-377, 478 - Josephus Antiq. Book xvii 1:3; Wars. Book ii 8:14) (1 Thes. 4:16). Paul uses this term in correspondence subsequent to his second epistle to the Corinthians, but not in specific relation to the resurrection of the flesh (2 Tim. 2:18; Phil. 3:12) (Charles 1963: 455-463).

Paul's early views on the resurrection were challenged by the Corinthian Believers, who, after being exposed to the teaching of Peter and Apollos (1 Cor. 1:12) (Barrett 1968: 3; Tenney 1961: 294) appeared to have adopted a belief in an immediate assumption on death (Schutz 1969: 439-457), claiming that 'there is no resurrection of the dead' (1 Cor. 15:12). On receiving feedback from Titus on the Corinthian's reception of his epistle to



them (2 Cor. 7:6-7,13-16; 10:10), Paul changed his view from spending time 'asleep' waiting for the resurrection, to receiving a dwelling made without hands and immediately going into the presence of God (2 Cor. 5:1-8) (Charles 1963: 455-461). In subsequent correspondence Paul never again speaks of the dead spending their time asleep awaiting the resurrection, nor does he specifically mention the resurrection of the flesh, i.e., the reanimation of the decomposed bodies of the saints.

The Jerusalem Church and those with close ties to it appear to have held to a belief that on death Believers are immediately resurrection into the presence of God. This appears to have had its roots in preaching attributed to Christ recorded in the earlier Gospels (Mt. 22:29-32; Mk. 12:24-27; Lk. 20:34-38) (Hick 1976: 181-183; Charles 1963: 395-400).

Christ taught that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were an example of the resurrected, which neither marry nor are given in marriage, and are as the angels who are in heaven.

Indications are that the bodily compositions of the resurrected will be similar to that of the angels in heaven. Peter, who had close ties with the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:1-12), appears to have held a similar view on the resurrection. He lays emphasis on the salvation of the soul (1 Pet. 1:9). The Early Church at Alexandria (Clement of Alexandria), which was believed to have been originated by Mark (Lafort 1999: The Church of Alexandria), Peter's disciple (Brown 1996: Introduction to the Gospel of Mark), interpreted the epistles of Peter to speak of the resurrection of the soul (Roberts 1997: Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 2. From the Latin Translation of Cassiodorus). The Epistles of Peter have definite parallels to Essenic literature and the writings of Enoch (1 Enoch) (Green 1968: 35-36; Allbright 1957: 2f.; Harrison 1964: 81), which display belief in a 'realised

eschatology' and immediate assumption on death (Charlesworth 1994: Vol. 1. p. 3,13 - 1QS. Col. 2. 24-25; Nickelsburg 1972: 148). The Epistle of Jude, which appears to have originated in Palestine (Green 1968: 48), has parallels with the epistles of Peter (Green 1968: 22-23), indicating a common belief system. The Epistle of James, which also originated in Judea (Tasker 1980: 28-30; Acts 15:13-29; 21:18), does not contradict an immediate resurrection on death. The writer of Revelation appears to hold to this view by speaking of the souls being translated into heaven on being martyred (Rev. 6:9-11;7:9-17) (Caird 1966: 86,254). On being raised into heaven these souls are given white garments (Rev. 6: 11; 7:13), signifying their receipt of glorified bodies (Caird 1966: 86,254). This view on the resurrection of the dead appears to have been the official view held by the Judean Church, the early leaders of the Church.

