

Biblical scholars have long held that the first relatively clear and certain reference to a doctrine of “the resurrection of the dead” occurs in Daniel 12. This is striking, since Daniel was almost certainly the final book of the Hebrew Bible to be written. Because of the barely disguised allusions to Antiochus Epiphanes in the second half of the book, it is almost always dated to roughly the Maccabean period, in the 160s BCE.

As I have indicated, in the prophets there were earlier references to some kind of national “resurrection” - as in Ezekiel 37 (and probably, for example, Isaiah 26:19) - in which the nation that had been metaphorically wasted away, killed, destroyed, would revive and once again come to life. But the prophets - from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, to the twelve so-called “minor” prophets - all shared the older Israelite view about what happens to a person who dies. She or he goes to Sheol, along with everyone else, to exist forever in a shadowy netherworld where nothing much happens - not even the worship of Yahweh.

Things have changed by the time we get to the Maccabean period. I am not saying that everyone now has adopted a new point of view. Possibly only a few people did so. But more and more accepted this view over time, so that two hundred years later, in the days of Jesus’ public ministry, this new view had taken hold and came to be one of the dominant views - if not the single most dominant view - throughout Judaism

In this view, Sheol was not ...

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