

I often get asked if ancient Judaism was influenced by Zoroastrianism or other kinds of Persian thought - especially when it comes to the specific doctrine of the "resurrection of the dead" and, more generally, the whole category of "apocalyptic thought." I used to think so! Now I'm not so sure. At all.

I've talked about apocalypticism and resurrection on the blog before. Here I'll discuss where these ideas came from, before, explaining more fully what they ended up looking like. This discussion is taken from an early draft of my forthcoming book [Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife](#).

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After the period of the classical prophets, Jewish thinkers came to imagine that in fact there would be life for the individual who had died. For them, there was a possibility of life beyond the grave - real, full, and abundant life. But in the original Jewish conception, unlike widespread Christian views today, the afterlife was not a glorious eternity lived in the soul in heaven or a tormented existence in hell, attained immediately at the point of death. It was something else altogether. It was the idea that at the end of time God would vindicate himself and his people. When history and all its evil and suffering had run its course, God would reassert his sovereignty over this world and destroy everything and everyone who was opposed to him, bringing in the perfect, utopian world he had originally planned. Inhabiting this world would be the righteous who had lived and suffered throughout all of history. God would miraculously bring them back into their bodies, and they would live, bodily, without any pain, misery, or suffering, for all time, in his most glorious kingdom.

Those who were wicked would also ...

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