

In yesterday's post I was explaining why I do not think we need to point to Zoroastrianism as the source or reason for the views of "the resurrection from the dead" emerged within Judaism. This view could have arisen within Judaism itself, because of some internal dynamics. Here in this post I explain how it may have happened.

I begin where I ended yesterday: in ancient Israel, as up to today, there have been people who think that the reason they suffer is because they have sinned and God is punishing them for it. Suffering comes from God, to penalize his people for not living as they should.

This is sometimes called the "prophetic" or the "classical" view of suffering, because it was the view widely advanced by the Hebrew prophets in the Bible.

Most people today, of course, realize it is never that simple. Do we really want to say that birth defects, the death of a child, Alzheimer's, or any of the other mind-numbing forms of suffering in extremis are punishments from God for something we did wrong?

That simple question is what eventually led some ancient Jewish thinkers to question the prophetic answer to why the people of God suffer. Maybe it would make sense that God ordained the destruction of the nation of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians as a punishment for the sins of the people. But if that's the case, why, when the people repented and returned to God's ways, doing its best to do what he demanded in his law, why then did they continue to experience social upheaval, political disaster, economic crisis, and military defeat?

Moreover, if the key to a life happy and blessed by God is keeping his law, and the path to pain and misery is breaking it, why is it that the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? Why do some people exploit the system, oppress the poor, snub the needy, violate every commandment God has ever given and then grow rich, influential, and deeply satisfied with themselves - only to die and get away with it? And why do other people, meek and humble, quietly live their lives by being concerned for those in need, giving what little money and resources they have to help others, yet lead lives of personal misery filled with pain, illness, poverty, and oppression, dying lonely and in pain?

It would make sense if there were no God. Or if there were many gods, some of whom were nasty. But how can it make sense if there is only one God who is truly good and completely in control of this world? It was a problem for Jewish thinkers. And eventually about two centuries before Jesus, they came up with a new solution. In a sense, the solution was ....

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