



DEATH & CHAOS

HELLFIRE

Afterlife beliefs in Second Temple Period Judaism

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Life After Death in the Old Testament

Compared to ancient Near Eastern literature and archaeological remains, the Hebrew Scriptures do not seem to convey a great deal regarding death and afterlife.

It is apparent from scripture that there was certainly an interest in and concern about the topic (e.g. Gen 5:24; Num 16:33; 1 Sam 2:6; 28:8-19; 2 Kgs 2:11; Isa 29:19; Ezek 37:1-14; Prov 12:28).

However, the overall impression from a study of the Old Testament passages relating to the afterlife, is death was not considered the start of the next life, but the end of the present.

Sheol was the destiny that awaited both the righteous and the wicked (Eccl 9:1-10), a place where everyone would be equal (Job 3:13-19; Ezek 32:18-32).

The biblical writers focused on the present life and centered on the covenant relationship between man and God.

The Hebrew Scriptures do not present a fully developed, or rather, a complete, comprehensive, and detailed description of the afterlife.

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By the end of the Second Temple Period, a belief in a bodily resurrection had become the mainstream belief in both surviving strands of Second Temple Period Judaism.

Rabbinic Judaism

- “All Israelites have a share in the world to come . . . And these are the ones who have no portion in the world to come: (1) He who says, the resurrection of the dead is a teaching which does not derive from the Torah, (2) and the Torah does not come from Heaven; and (3) an Epicurean” (m. Sanh. 10:1).

Early Christian Church

- For Christians, questioning this doctrine was equated with questioning the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection, the basis of Christianity’s salvation hope (e.g. 1 Cor 15).

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A small silhouette of a person stands in a bright doorway on the left side of the slide, looking out into a dark, textured space. The doorway is a vertical strip of light, and the person is positioned at the bottom of it.

Minimalists view:

The resurrection belief developed during the later part of the Second Temple Period, due to the persecution during the Maccabean period. There appears to be only one obvious resurrection text in the Hebrew Scripture, Daniel 12:1-3, which dates to this period. However, even this passage does not present a universal resurrection belief.

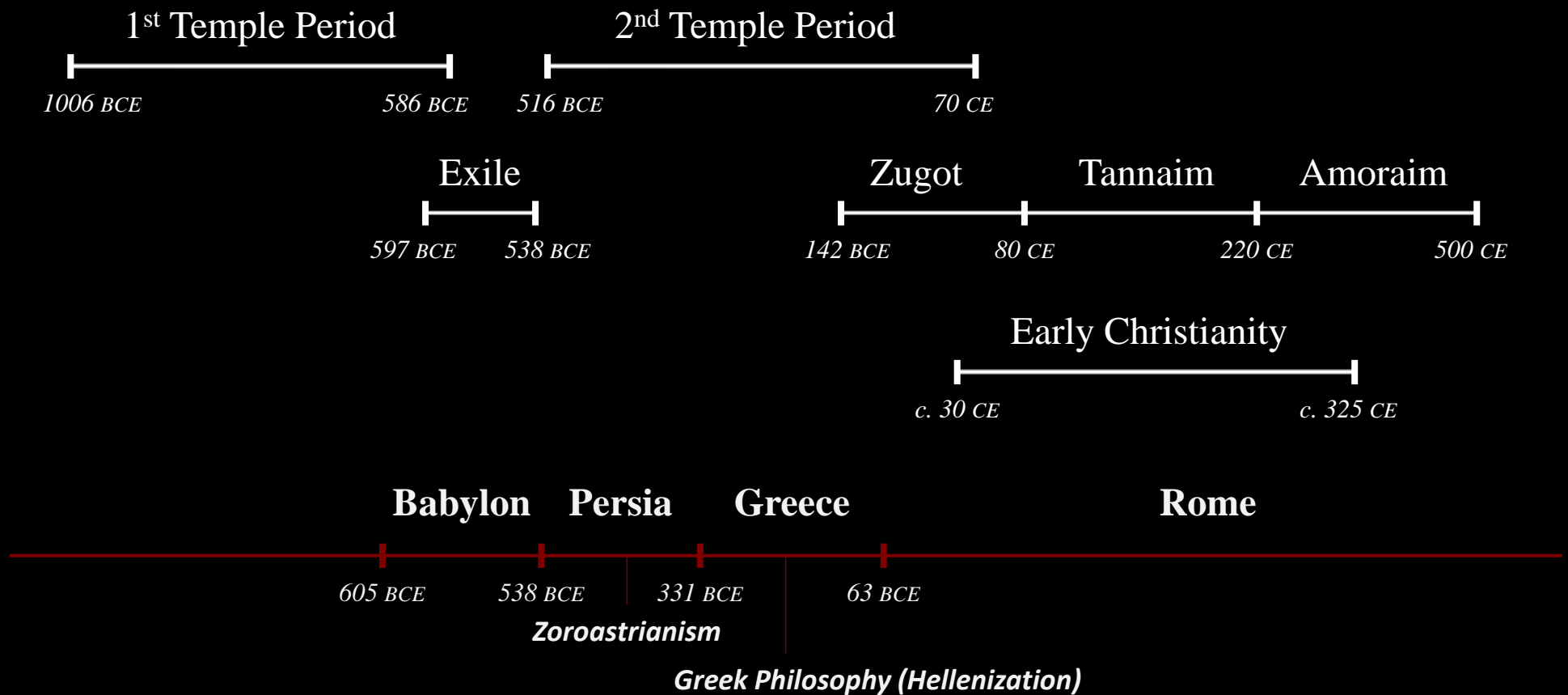
Maximalist view:

The resurrection belief appears in the oldest parts of the Hebrew Scripture, i.e. Job 19:25-27, and as such, is a foundational doctrine in the Hebrew Scripture. It is assumed the Israelites believed in a future, universal resurrection when interpreting scripture.

However, there are no references to Job 19:26 in any Second Temple Period literature, nor in early Rabbinic literature - the time when the Rabbis examined the Tanakh for resurrection passages.

The first recorded case of a resurrection interpretation of Job 19:25-27 appears in late 1st cent. C.E. (1 Clem 26.3).

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The Second Temple Period

The close of the First Temple Period and the return of the Jews from Babylonian exile heralded much more exploration of the issue of the afterlife among Second Temple Period Jews.

The Persian (538-331 B.C.E.) and later the Greco-Roman Empire (331 B.C.E. – 5th/6th century C.E.) made a significant impact on Second Temple Period Judaism.

Scholars argue these empirical powers influenced both the culture and belief system of Judaism:

- **Zoroastrian religion** => Interest in angels, the battle between good and evil, interest in a future bodily resurrection, and judgment.
- **Hellenization of Judaism** => Belief in an immortal soul, which exists separately from the physical body after the moment of death.

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The Second Temple Period (continued)

The Problem of Theodicy became more apparent for the Jews

- Foreign occupation, oppression, religious persecution, and martyrdom.
- Retribution principle seemed flawed.

Theocracy (rule of God by the Priests) => Nomocracy (ruled by law through the Scholars)

Communal thinking => Individualism (Jer 31:29 || Ezek 18:2)

City states => Nation states => Empires

The Jews of the Second Temple Period borrowed religious and philosophical concepts from Persia and Greece. They synthesized and amalgamated these views into their own religious framework.

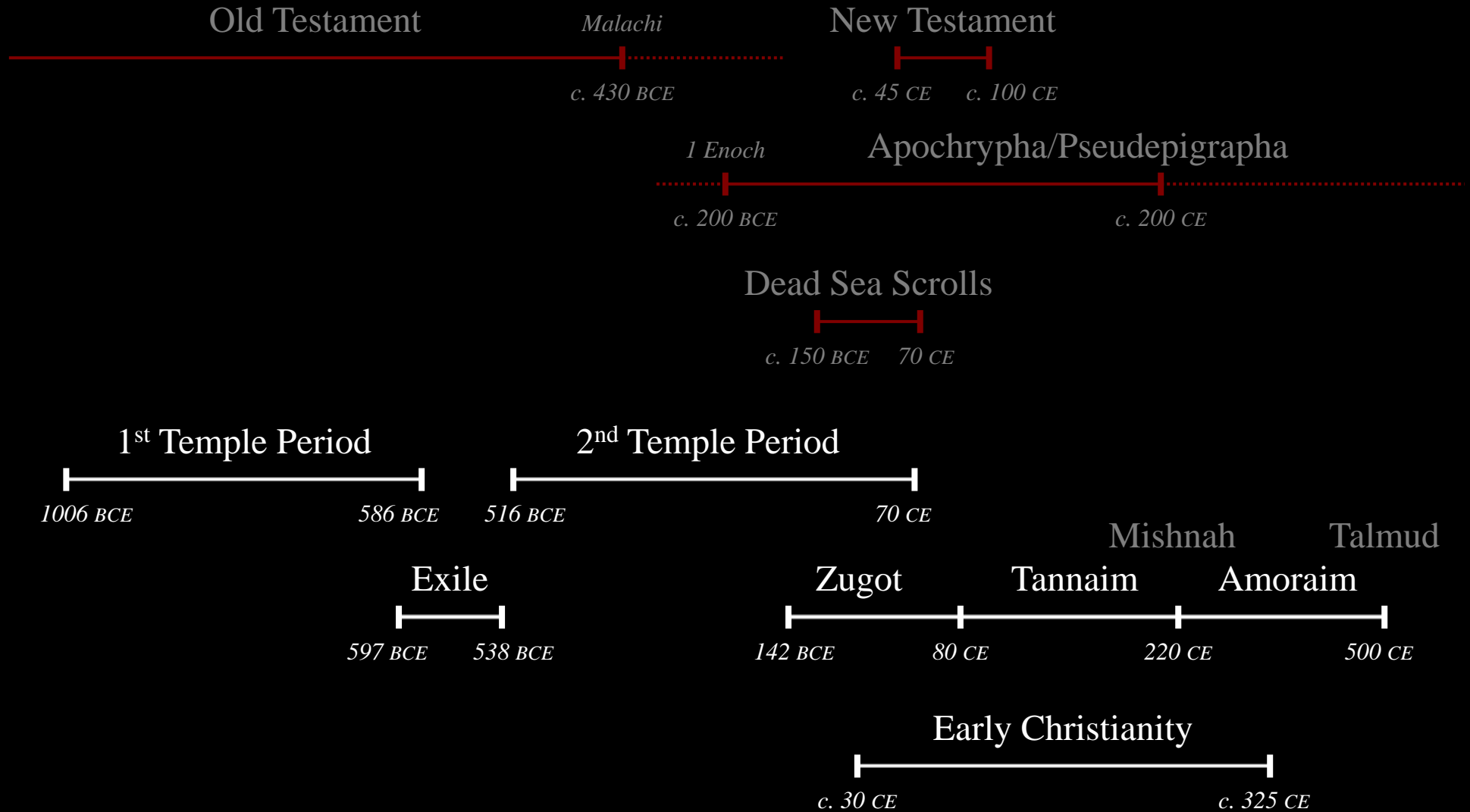
Multiple afterlife beliefs developed and appeared in their literature, in an attempt to solve the problem of theodicy.

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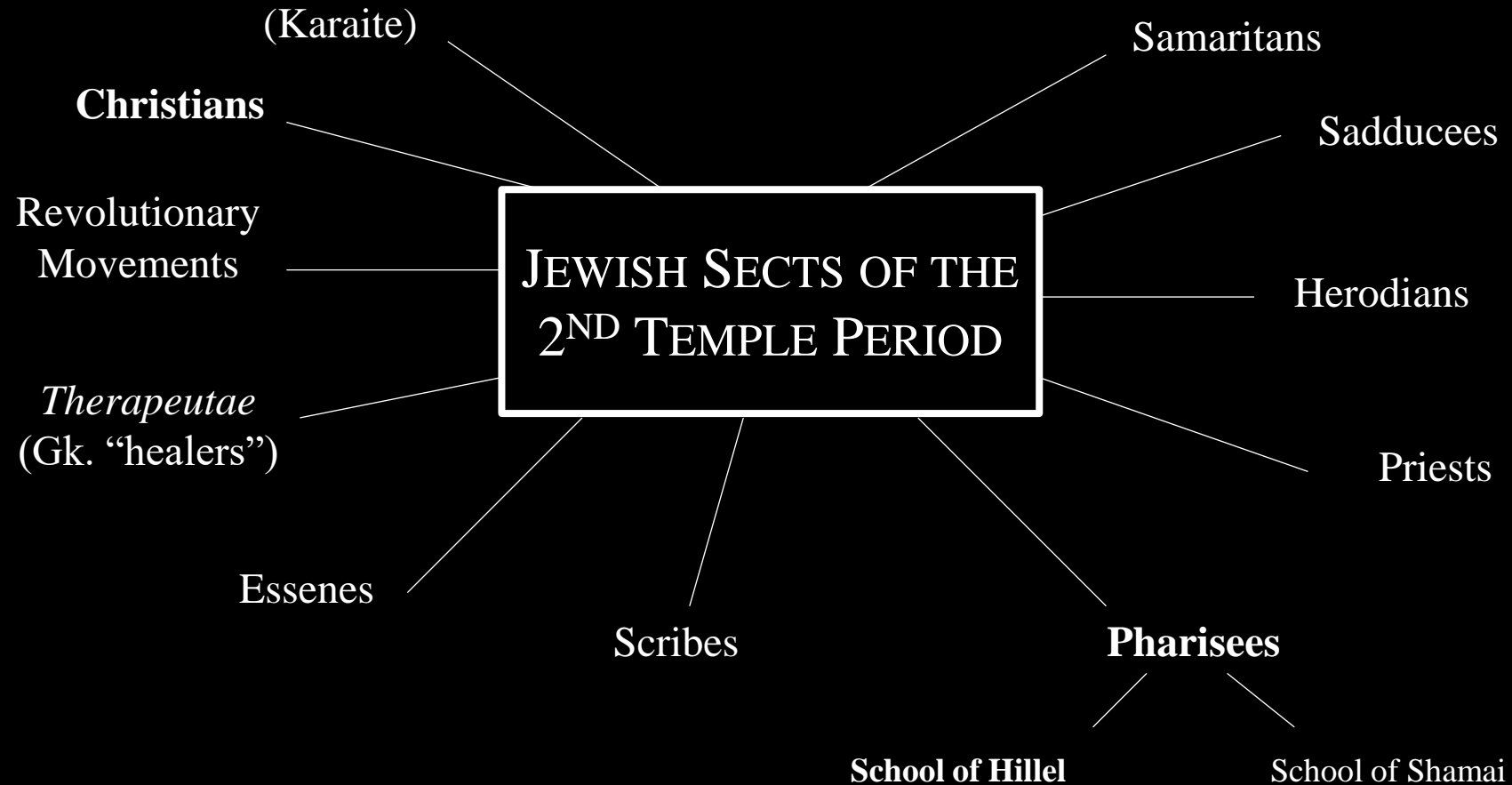
Jewish Literature in the Second Temple Period

- Old Testament
- Old Testament translations (LXX, Targum, Qumran, Samaritan Pentateuch)
- Apocrypha/Pseudepigrapha
- Dead Sea Scrolls
- Philo (20 BCE – 50 CE)
- New Testament
- Josephus (37 CE – 100 CE)
- Rabbinic Literature (Liturgical Texts, Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud, Midrash Rabbah)

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The different views of the afterlife fall into two main categories based on the opinion held regarding the nature of the soul.



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A person is standing in a doorway, looking out into a dark, stormy night. The person is silhouetted against the bright light coming from the doorway. The background is a dark, textured wall and floor, with a bright light source creating a strong contrast.

Mortal “Soul”

A rejection of an afterlife

- Sadducees – *Ant.* 13.5.9; 18:1.4. *J.W.* 2.8.15; Matt 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-37; Luke 20:27-40; Acts 23:6-9).

A future limited resurrection of all the righteous

- Several New Testament passages seem to suggest only believers in Jesus Christ will be resurrected and receive eternal life (e.g. Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 15:12-57; 1 Thess 4:13-18).

A future limited resurrection of the most righteous and the most wicked

- Dan 12:1-3, 13 – describes a double resurrection

A future universal resurrection

- E.g. 2 Bar. 49-52; T. Benj. 10:2-11; Ascen. Isa. 4:14-22; Apoc. Mos 13; L.A.B. 3:10; Matt 25:31-46; Acts 24:15, 21; Rev 20:4-6, 12-15.

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Immortal “Soul”

Some form of existence in Sheol

- Deut 26:14 suggests some Israelites must have believed in some form of existence in Sheol and felt a need to provide food for the dead. This is further supported by Saul’s use of a medium to request a prophetic message from the dead prophet Samuel (1 Sam 28:7-19).

A belief that the soul left the body to have an independent existence until the day of a universal judgement when it would return to its resurrected body

- Pharisees – *Ant.* 18:1.3; *J.W.* 2.8.14; Acts 23:6-9; Hippolytus, *Haer.* 28; This synthesized view appears in e.g. 2 Esdras 7:32-38; *Apocr Ezek*, frag 1.

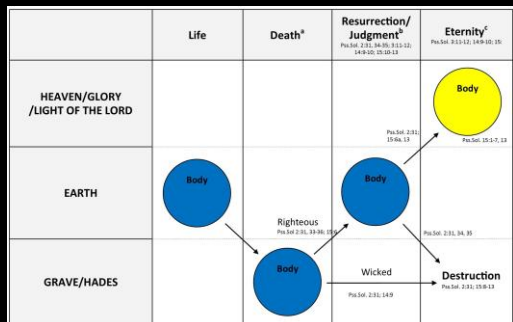
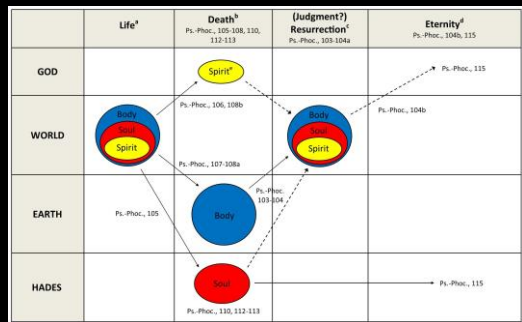
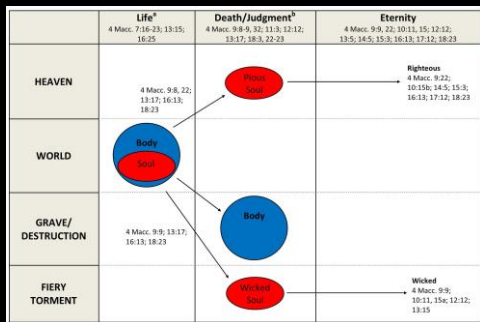
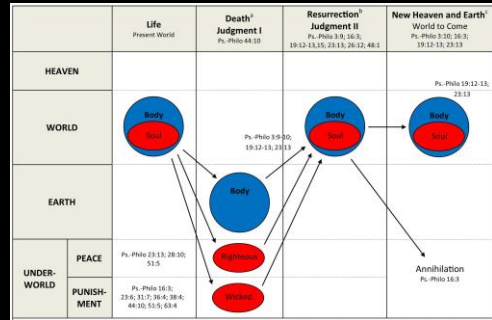
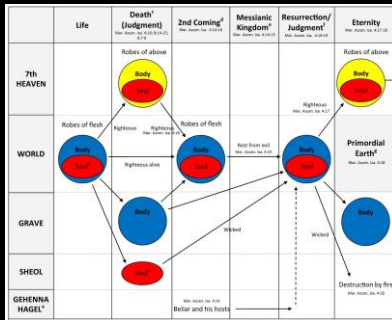
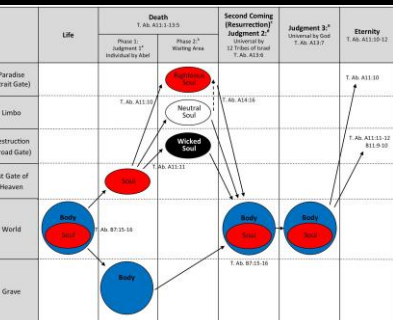
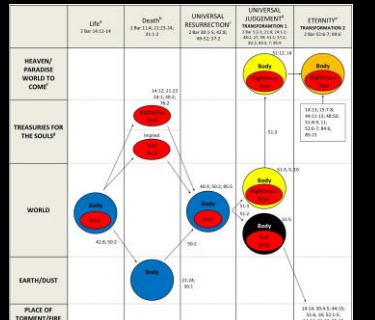
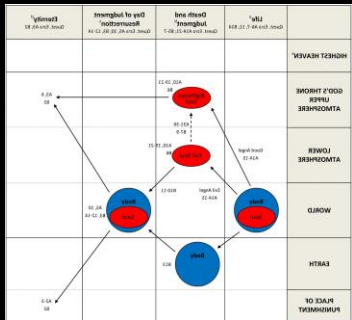
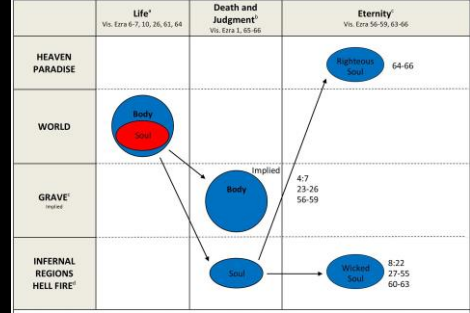
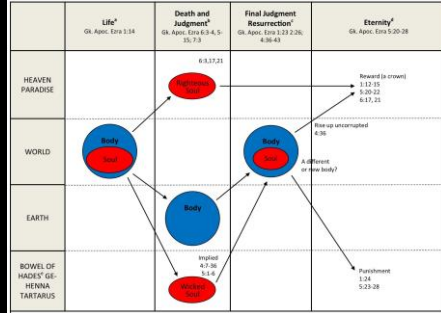
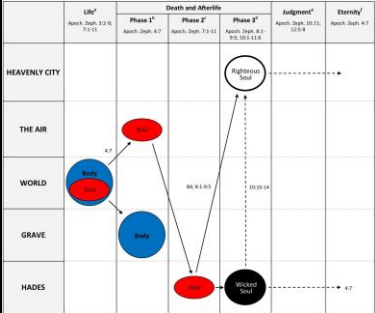
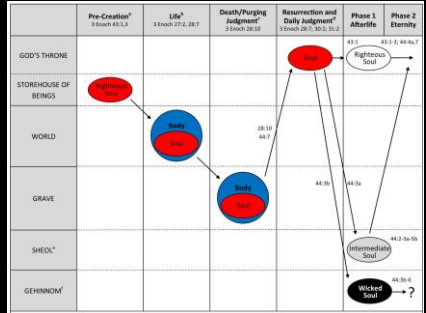
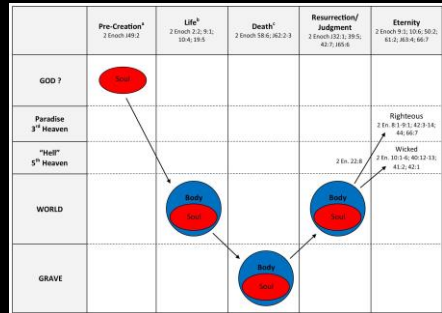
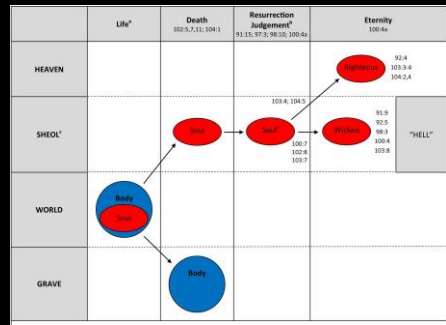
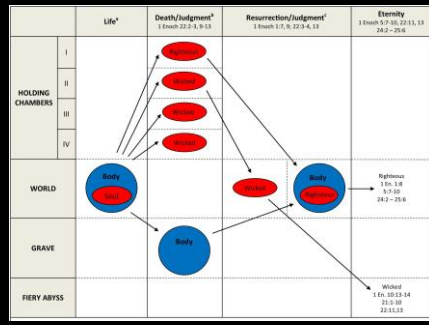
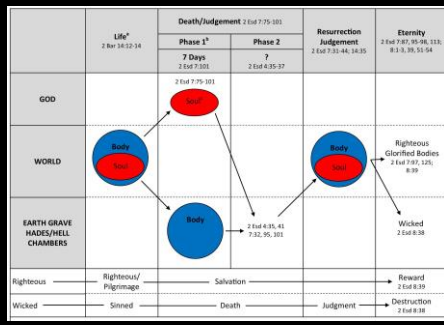
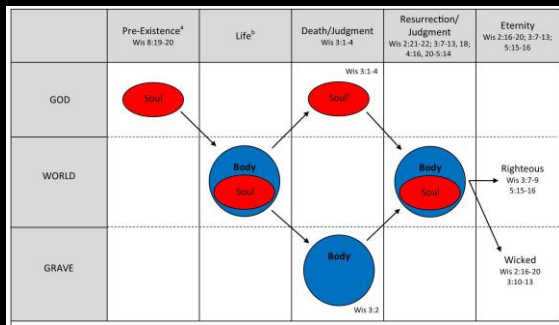
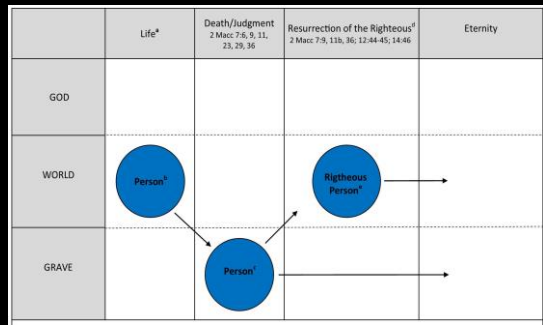
A belief that the soul left the body at the time of death and would live independently with no need for a future resurrection, since the good or bad soul would receive its just reward

- According to Josephus, this view was held by the Essenes (*Ant.* 18.1.5; *J.W.* 2.8.11;) and Eleazar ben Yair, the rebel leader at Masada (*J.W.* 7.8.7). However, Hippolytus of Rome (*Elenchus* 27.1) suggests the Essenes did believe in a bodily resurrection. Philo Judaeus was one of the strongest advocates of the immortality of the soul doctrine without mentioning a bodily resurrection.

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1. *Diverse resurrection views.*

- Eighteen distinct views on life-after-death with varying degrees of complexity.
- Each literary work containing a life-after-death view seems to present a unique perspective.



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1. Diverse resurrection views.
2. No progress from a basic to a more complex death and resurrection view as various levels of complexity are found throughout this period.
3. No linear development of the resurrection belief.
4. Multiple views co-existed.
5. No evidence in this literature in support of the notion of a shift in focus from a bodily resurrection toward the immortality of the soul.
6. Terms and concepts present in Greek philosophical texts were adopted to fit into the theological framework of these compositions.

