



Handout for week of 11/12/18 Mk. 13: 24-32 & Dan. 12: 1-3

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Dan. 12: 1 And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time; and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. 2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to reproaches and everlasting abhorrence. 3 And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn the many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

**COMMENTARY:** The first reading for next week is from the book of Daniel and is from what is called apocalyptic literature in the scriptures. It also includes the book of Revelation in the New Testament. It is generally concerned with the end times, the second coming, and often addresses a time of great suffering and tribulation. However, despite what some of our fundamentalist brothers and sisters declare, it is not at all a prognostication of the future, but rather a whole genre of literature that encouraged faithful believers in a time of great persecution to remain steadfast in their religious beliefs and observances. Apocalyptic literature was written in "coded" language using colors, symbols, metaphors and visions to encourage each other. That way if the persecuting authorities got ahold of it, it wouldn't incriminate the believers.

Thus, in the book of Daniel the author heard the voice of the Lord, and had a vision of Michael, the great prince, helping the faithful escape the distress of a great persecution. In the case of Daniel, the persecution was from Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who was trying with great force to eradicate Judaism in favor of Hellenism, the religion and culture of the Greeks. Many, but not all, of those who died would live forever in the happiness of heaven, though some would receive "everlasting horror and disgrace." The ancients believed that the righteous who died would take a place in the sky to shine like stars, leading many to justice, as stars helped control and determine the fate of earthly humans. Fr. Robert Beck

[Life After Death](#): What happens after we die?

Judaism is famously ambiguous about this matter. The immortality of the soul, the World to Come, and the resurrection of the dead all feature prominently in Jewish tradition, but the logistics of what these things are and how they relate to each other has always been ambiguous.

Jewish conceptions of heaven and hell--Gan Eden and Gehinnom--are associated with the belief in immortality and/or the World to Come, and were also developed independent of these concepts.

Most Jewish ideas about the afterlife developed in post-biblical times.

The Bible itself has very few references to life after death. Sheol, the bowels of the earth, is portrayed as the place of the dead, but in most instances Sheol seems to be more a metaphor for oblivion than an actual place where the dead "live" and retain consciousness.

The notion of resurrection appears in two late biblical sources, Daniel 12 and Isaiah 25-26.

Daniel 12:2--"Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to eternal life, others to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence"--implies that resurrection will be followed by a day of judgment. Those judged favorably will live forever and those judged to be wicked will be punished.

Later Jewish tradition, however, is not clear about exactly who will be resurrected, when it will happen, and what will take place.

Some sources imply that the resurrection of the dead will occur during the messianic era. Others indicate that resurrection will follow the messianic era. Similarly, according to some, only the righteous will be resurrected, while according to others, everyone will be resurrected and--as implied in Daniel--a day of judgment will follow.

The Daniel text probably dates to the second century BCE, and at some point during the two centuries that followed, another afterlife idea entered Judaism: the immortality of the soul, the notion that the human soul lives on even after the death of the body. In the Middle Ages, Jewish mystics expanded this idea, developing theories about reincarnation--the transmigration of the soul.

The World to Come (olam haba) is the most ubiquitous Jewish eschatological idea (i.e. idea related to the end of days). It appears in early rabbinic sources as the ultimate reward of the individual Jew (and possibly the righteous gentile). The Talmud contains scattered descriptions of the World to Come, sometimes comparing it to spiritual things such as studying Torah, other times comparing it to physical pleasures, such as sex.

However, not surprisingly, it is not obvious what exactly the "World to Come" is and when it will exist. According to Nahmanides, among others, the World to Come is the era that will be ushered in by the resurrection of the dead, the world that will be enjoyed by the righteous who have merited additional life. According to Maimonides, the World to Come refers to a time even beyond the world of the resurrected. He believed that the resurrected will eventually die a second death, at which point the souls of the righteous will enjoy a spiritual, bodiless existence in the presence of God.

Still, in other sources, the World to Come refers to the world inhabited by the righteous immediately following death--i.e. heaven, Gan Eden. In this view, the World to Come exists now, in some parallel universe.

Indeed, the notion of heaven and hell may be the most ambiguous of all Jewish afterlife ideas. References to Gehinnom as a fiery place of judgment can be found in the apocalyptic literature of the Second Temple period. The Talmud embellished this idea, claiming that Gehinnom is 60 times hotter than earthly fire (Berakhot 57b).

The earliest reference to Gan Eden and Gehinnom as a pair is probably the rabbinic statement of the 1st century sage Yohanan ben Zakkai: "There are two paths before me, one leading to Gan Eden and the other to Gehinnom (Berakhot 28b)."

Many questions remain, however. If the sources that refer to the World to Come are referring to Gan Eden, then what is the world of the resurrected? And if judgment immediately follows death, then what need is there for the judgment that will follow the resurrection?

Though some Jewish scholars have tried to clarify these ideas, it would be impossible to reconcile all the Jewish texts and sources that discuss the afterlife.