

Jesus has run into another tough question. It wasn't unusual since many folks had been asking Jesus questions—Who is he? Why can he do miracles? What is going to happen?

This question, however, is different. The Sadducees have set up the question to make resurrection look ridiculous. All those brothers, all those wives. What a situation when they all die! Jesus solves the question by responding that there will be no husbands or wives in Heaven. But why did the Sadducees raise this question?

The Sadducees were a group of Jews who, for centuries, had been running the temple and most of the rest of Jewish life. They were generally the wealthier Jews, were friendly with Rome, were more Greek-like, and ran most of the government of that time. They were strict literal believers that only the Torah controlled all Jewish life. They rejected the rest of what we now call the Old Testament—the Prophets, Psalms, and any oral traditions the Jews had built up over the centuries.

The Sadducees believed there is no fate to which people are predestined, that man has free will, and that the soul is not immortal; hence there is no afterlife, and there are no rewards or penalties after death. Everyone dies and goes to Sheol, which is sort of an underground place of darkness. So, they were literalists who didn't dream too big.

Jesus, with His promises of love and kindness for all those who came to Him after this life, was a threat to their way of thinking.

And why would resurrection be so important to the Pharisees and other Jews? Part of it is the matter of which books in the Bible are considered to be inspired by God. As I've said, the Sadducees dealt only with the Torah, while the Pharisees and others also read the Prophets and Psalms as God's words, and it was in those extra books that the Pharisees found justification for trusting in a resurrection of the dead and life after death.

But the bigger deal was the matter of the ultimate justice of the world. The Sadducees understood this world to be the only world in which God would be a

keeper of covenantal promises—you're here, and then you're gone forever. Pharisees and now Christians understood that God would keep promises and enact justice even beyond the boundaries of this world. Life was eternal, and God would take care of us beyond today's difficult situation.

As it turns out, the Sadducees disappeared from Jewish life with the Roman destruction of the temple and Jerusalem around 70 AD. They lost. Now we Christians, as the inheritors of both the Old and New Testaments, have a strong belief in resurrection and an afterlife. We can look forward to that eternity of time, sitting at the right hand of God the Father— as long as we don't mess up big time!

Jesus answered big. We won. Life is wonderful. Amen to all!