

Jewish Prayer for the Dead 3

Machabees (II Mach. xii, 44-46) abundantly proves, the idea of a resurrection and the belief that the time of that resurrection might be accelerated by the intercessions of the living, was present to the minds of some at least of the Jews in the first or second century before the Christian era. The sacred writer states in unmistakable terms that "If he (Judas Machabeus) had not hoped that they that were slain should rise again, it would have seemed superfluous and vain to pray for the dead. . . . It is therefore a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from sins."¹ The same idea is emphasized in the Jewish "Sifre" on Deuteronomy (n. 210) and in other early Rabbinical treatises. Indeed, it may be said that the prayer known as the "Kaddish" is now commonly considered by the Jews to have the power of releasing the souls of the deceased from punishment in the next world. It would, therefore, seem highly probable that the practice of prayer for the dead was too much a matter of course among orthodox Jews in the time of our Lord to be specially emphasized in the New Testament or among sub-apostolic writers. Many commentators upon the Epistles of St. Paul consider that Onesiphorus was dead when St. Paul uttered the prayer, "The Lord grant him to find mercy of the Lord in that day,"² and

¹ The passage is variously punctuated; I follow the Vulgate.

² II Tim. i, 18.