

A mainstay, of both traditional Judaism and Christianity, is the firm belief in the future resurrection of the dead. But what happens to people in the time between death and resurrection? Do people somehow go into absolute unconsciousness, only to then be somehow recreated? Is the death of a human being little different than the death of an animal? Or, is the death of a human being quite different than the death of an animal, with the consciousness of mind, memory, experience, and creativity—often called to be a “soul”—temporarily held in another dimension until the resurrection? This is a debate presently taking place throughout the broad Messianic community.

A much more vigorous debate takes place regarding what is going to occur to unrepentant, unrighteous sinners. Will these people experience a never-ending, ongoing eternal punishment? Or, will these people experience an obliteration from existence? Strong and firm disagreements between those who affirm some sort of ongoing eternal punishment, versus those who believe in annihilationism, have been present in Christian theology for the past century. These debates have been taken up by many people within the Messianic sphere of influence, with more than a few not quite knowing how to sort through it.

This resource, *Messianics and the Afterlife*, thoroughly discusses the issues of the intermediate state between death and resurrection, and the different dimensions of eternal punishment. It also offers some Q & A on the afterlife, and a preliminary analysis on where much of the subject matter currently stands for our faith community, in the 2020s.

MESSIANICS

AND THE AFTERLIFE

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J.K. McKee

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messianicapologetics.net

Messianics and the Afterlife

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Abbreviation Chart and Special Terms

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	Heb: Hebrew
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
Ara: Aramaic	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	KJV: King James Version
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore</i> (1996)
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
CGL: <i>Cambridge Greek Lexicon</i> (2021)	LES: <i>Lexham English Septuagint</i> (2019)
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Holladay)	LS: <i>An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell-Scott)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	LSJM: <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
CJSB: Complete Jewish Study Bible (2016)	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	LXX: Septuagint
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	m. Mishnah
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	MT: Masoretic Text
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
Ger: German	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
GNT: Greek New Testament	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
Grk: Greek	
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	

Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: New International Version (1984)
NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
NT: New Testament
OT: Old Testament
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament

Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

Introduction

Without any doubt, one of the most uncomfortable subjects which any human being has to confront in life is **death**. You do not have to be that well versed in reading the Bible, to adequately understand how *death is a part of living*. With the possible exception of those who will actually be alive at the moment of the Second Coming (1 Corinthians 15:51), the biological life functions of each and every one of us will cease. A mainstay, of both Judaism and Christianity, has been the firm belief in the future resurrection of the dead. A Scripture passage like Daniel 12:1 unambiguously declares, “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake...” (NASU). Everyone whom I know in today’s broad Messianic movement, would agree that the deceased from all ages will have their physical remains reanimated and resurrected to new biological life.

Yet for many, questions abound about what is to occur in the time period between physical death and future resurrection. Do people somehow go into absolute unconsciousness, only to then be somehow recreated? Is the death of a human being little different than the death of an animal? Is the death of a human being quite different than the death of an animal, with the consciousness of mind, memory, experience, and creativity—more often called in the vernacular to be a “soul”—temporarily held in another dimension until the resurrection?

A much more vigorous debate takes place regarding what occurs to unrepentant, unrighteous sinners. Will the condemned experience a never-ending, ongoing eternal punishment? Or, will the condemned experience an obliteration from existence? Strong and firm disagreements between those who affirm some sort of ongoing eternal punishment, versus those who believe in annihilationism, have been present in Christian theology for the past century.

The topic of eternal punishment, or Hell as it is most commonly known, is not one which brings any degree of happiness or joy to the Bible teacher. *It brings a great deal of unhappiness and lamentation*. Yet, it is not a topic which can at all be legitimately ignored. It is one which requires an evaluation of the different ideologies involved, a classification of various original language terms regarding “destroy” and their nuances, the time

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and setting of various passages of Scripture—and above all a weighing of the value of an individual's salvation.

This updated and expanded volume takes up some of the uncomfortable discussion which has gone on in contemporary theology regarding death, the afterlife, eternal punishment, and how it affects our contemporary Messianic faith community. No person within today's Messianic movement, should ever have to wait until the uncomfortable moment of facing death—to sort through some of the main theological and ideological matters of the afterlife. It is my sincere hope that this resource, *Messianics and the Afterlife*, will be used to help you answer and resolve the different dimensions of human composition and destiny.

J.K. McKee
Editor, Messianic Apologetics

What Happens Between Death and the Resurrection?

Death is one of the most difficult topics which any human being ever has to deal with.¹ None of us likes dealing with the death of a family member, a close friend, or even people we do not know but still admire. Many people regularly visit the gravesite of a loved one, whereas others have their remains cremated and scattered into the wind. Even if you do not regularly visit a cemetery where your loved one may be buried, thoughts and memories of the deceased will undoubtedly still come to your mind from time to time, and the last memory you may have of such a person—that of your loved one’s funeral—is perhaps what you remember.

The Holy Scriptures give us as Believers a great deal of comfort, as we know that we will see those who die in the faith again. Those of us who believe in the doctrine of resurrection, know that a gravesite is not the final destination. The Apostle Paul, writing to the Thessalonians who had largely not grown up in a culture of resurrection, corrected them with this instruction:

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, NASU).

The doctrine of resurrection is comforting, because the process of decomposition will be reversed. No matter how hard the funeral industry may try to retard decay via embalming, the placement of a body in an hermetically sealed casket, and then the placement of a casket in a heavy airtight vault—a corpse will still decay. But as the Scriptures so properly

¹ This analysis was originally entitled “To Be Absent From the Body” (2009).