

**TO BE ABSENT
FROM THE BODY**

BOOKS BY J.K. McKEE

The Messianic Walk

*Salvation on the Line, Volume I: The Nature of Yeshua and His Divinity—
Gospels and Acts*

*Salvation on the Line, Volume II: The Nature of Yeshua and His Divinity—
General Epistles, Pauline Epistles, & Later New Testament*

*Confronting Critical Issues: An Analysis of Subjects that Affects the Growth
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Men and Women in the Body of Messiah: Answering Crucial Questions

TO BE ABSENT FROM THE BODY

J.K. McKee

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

TO BE ABSENT FROM THE BODY

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Cover imagery: Sindre Strøm/Pexels

ISBN 978-1537390369 (paperback)

ISBN 979-8742199700 (hardcover)

ASIN B008H8LB5U (eBook)

Published by Messianic Apologetics, a division of Outreach Israel Ministries

P.O. Box 516

McKinney, Texas 75070

(407) 933-2002

www.outreachisrael.net

www.messianicapologetics.net

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This volume is dedicated to

David G. Pavlik (1949-2012)

a servant, a shepherd, a friend

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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>	understand what a Biblical text means on its own
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	Ger: German
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	GNT: Greek New Testament
Ara: Aramaic	Grk: Greek
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	Heb: Hebrew
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>	ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	KJV: King James Version
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore</i> (1996)
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	
exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to	

LXX: Septuagint
m. Mishnah
MT: Masoretic Text
NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: New English Bible (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIGTC: *New International Greek Testament Commentary*
NICNT: *New International Commentary on the New Testament*
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
orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world

OT: Old Testament
PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*
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*
TEV: Today's English Version (1976)
TLV: Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant (2011)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
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
WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*
Yid: Yiddish
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

Introduction

Without any doubt, one of the most uncomfortable subjects that 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 that *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, is the firm belief in the future resurrection of the dead. A Scripture passage like Daniel 12:1 unambiguously tells us, “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 Jews, and many more Christians, questions abound about what is to occur between the moments of physical death and future resurrection. *What happens to people?* 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 much 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?

There are many important theological and philosophical questions to be considered about the intermediate state between death and the resurrection. Many in the broad Messianic movement believe in some sort of conscious, disembodied afterlife following death. Many others do not. *They all attend Messianic congregations together*. Frequently, though, one’s views or opinions surrounding the condition of the departed between death and the resurrection only crops up once and a while—but subsequent to the death of a fellow congregational member, is a debate that can get absolutely out of control. Accusations from those who do not believe in any kind of intermediate afterlife before the

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resurrection, can be particularly offsetting to people, who have often not heard them before.

This publication, *To Be Absent From the Body*, has brought together my article by the aforementioned name and some critical FAQ entries. While as a ministry, Outreach Israel and Messianic Apologetics would fully affirm, in the words of some contemporary theologians, that the Bible is more concerned about “the life *after* the afterlife”—meaning what is to occur after the resurrection—there are definite questions of human dignity and worth to be evaluated regarding the intermediate state. I believe that this volume addresses this subject quite well, and that if you have a relative, a friend, or another loved one who has passed away knowing the Lord—that you can be assured that he or she is consciously in His presence right now—**but is also quite eager to return to the Earth to see His Kingdom restored!**

J.K. McKee
Editor, Messianic Apologetics

To Be Absent From the Body

Death is one of the most difficult topics that any human being ever has to deal with. 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 not largely originally 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 put it, “I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you shall know that I am the LORD” (Ezekiel 37:6,

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NASU). Isaiah 26:19 likewise says, “Your dead will live; their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy” (NASU). The resurrection of our Lord Yeshua should assure us that those who have died in faith will also be resurrected, with bodies that will live and breathe again: “Messiah has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20, NASU).

The doctrine of resurrection is something very important for each of us to believe, especially as it concerns salvation and what Yeshua has accomplished for us (Hebrews 9:28). Yet undeniably connected to the doctrine of resurrection is what happens to the deceased in the interim. What is the intermediate condition of those who have died? Are our friends and loved ones, who knew the Lord during their lives and were saved, simply waiting in the ground for that day of resurrection, their bodies decaying? Or, are our friends and loved ones, who knew the Lord during their lives and were saved, **in the presence of the Lord**, awaiting to be reunited with their bodies on that day of resurrection?

Belief in a post-mortem afterlife, where deceased Believers wait in Heaven in the presence of the Lord until the time of resurrection, has come under considerable attack in the past century, primarily from theological liberals, but now even from some who would identify as theological conservatives. Even in our own Messianic movement, the idea that “going to Heaven when you die” is not a Biblical teaching, has gained much ground in various sectors, even though there has been little detailed engagement with the ramifications of such a view. The words of the Maccabean martyrs, “For if we so die, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will welcome us, and all the fathers will praise us” (4 Maccabees 13:17, RSV; cf. 9:8-9), are not heard. Ignored are the countless testimonies of faithful Believers who have lived their lives knowing that once they die, they will meet their Savior, having glimpses of Him in their twilight moments. And what of the conviction of those who know that when they worship the Lord, they join in with a company of angels and holy ones or saints, who are in Heaven right now worshipping the Lord (Hebrews 12:22-23)?

While he firmly held to the doctrine of resurrection, Paul’s own words “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Philippians 1:23, RSV), or perhaps more significantly, **“I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord”** (2 Corinthians 5:8, NASU), get quickly left out of the discussion. Frequently, it is not until one is facing death—either the death of a loved one, or one’s own personal death—that the subject comes up. Many, because of all of the rhetoric that has been floating around, are

confused and do not know what to believe about the time between death and resurrection. They do not know what to think between hearing things about Hellenistic philosophy, the different dimensions of life and death, Sheol and the grave, and whether or not the human being is unique among God's creatures in comparison to the animals.

It is easy to say that this is a topic worthy of our discussion, lest we be confused any longer. An evaluation of the subject matter, and an impetus not to oversimplify things, is needed. The subject of death and resurrection is supposed to be something elementary (Hebrews 6:1-2), meaning that it is *to already be understood* by mature men and women of God. Is our inability to understand this properly as Messianic Believers an indication that we are not as mature as we should be? What are the motives of Believers who are convicted that when they die they will be immediately transported into the presence of their Savior, and the motives of those who think that they will just fall asleep into sheer unconsciousness and be buried?

Stopping the Confusion

When surveying the debate over the intermediate state between death and resurrection, there are people across today's broad Messianic movement who are confused. Most of Messianic Judaism's position on the intermediate state between death and resurrection has been the same as most of evangelical Protestantism: a Believer in the Messiah departs this Earth for the presence of the Lord, with the person's consciousness (sometimes called a "soul") to be returned to his or her reanimated physical body at the time of resurrection.¹ Today, however, instead of hearing things like "In My Father's house are many dwelling places..." (John 14:2, NASU), many in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement will instead declare "...the dead do not know anything..." (Ecclesiastes 9:5, NASU).

The doctrine of psychopannychy—more commonly known by the vernacular "soul sleep"—is not viewed as heresy in today's evangelicalism, but is instead viewed as a theological aberration.² I

¹ Consult David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), pp 134, 594.

² Everett F. Harrison, "soul sleep," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 492; Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985), pp 447-459.

Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Immortality or Resurrection? A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1998), 189 actually considers any kind of dualistic view of human nature to be a "deadly heresy." Contrary to this, Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, pp 447-459 only considers the views of Bacchiocchi's Seventh-Day Adventist