



OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries
and MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS



JULY 2024

CURRENT STATUS

MESSIANICS AND THE AFTERLIFE



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STATEMENT OF BELIEF

*Outreach Israel Ministries
and Messianic Apologetics*

There is One Almighty Creator God of the Universe, who has revealed Himself to us in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Scriptures and is fully God. It is mandatory for us to believe in a Divine Redeemer to be saved. Salvation is a free gift of God to all who receive Messiah Yeshua into their lives and confess of their sins. Those who reject Messiah will be consigned to eternal punishment.

The Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are the inspired, infallible Word of God as revealed in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts

All Believers in Israel's Messiah are to be regarded as a part of the Commonwealth of Israel. Jewish and non-Jewish Believers are to respect one another in mutual love as brothers and sisters, and are to work together for the salvation of the Jewish people and return of Israel's Messiah.

The Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) is the foundation of all Scripture, was followed by our Messiah Yeshua, and is to still be studied and heeded by Believers today.

Yeshua the Messiah is coming to gather the Believers after the Tribulation period.

OIM is an *agapē* ministry, freely and benevolently giving the vast majority of its teachings and resources, without charge, to those who desire to be spiritually nourished.

For a fuller Statement of Faith, consult the OIM website

Outreach Israel News is the monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries, a non-profit organization with an emphasis on reaching, teaching, and encouraging the Messianic community. Subscription to **Outreach Israel News** is without cost and supported only by donation.

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OLM UPDATE

July 2024

J.K. McKee

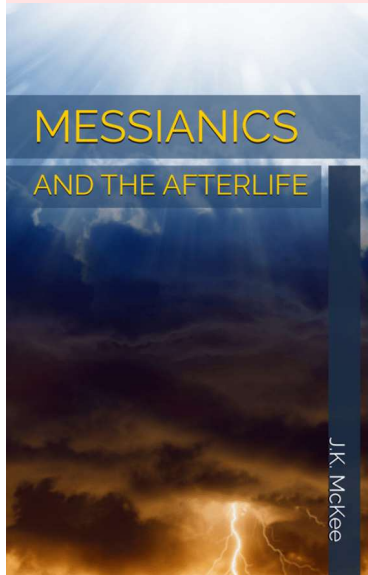
What is the current status of the subject matter of the afterlife, as witnessed within today's broad Messianic community, in the mid-2020s? Like many who were raised in evangelical Protestantism, I was taught that when a Believer in Yeshua or Jesus died, he or she went to be with Him in Heaven, until His return and the resurrection of the dead. I was also taught that if someone did not come to salvation in Him, he or she would spend a conscious eternity in Hell. It was not until I entered my under-graduate studies at the University of Oklahoma (1999), when I heard of concepts such as psychopannychy ("soul sleep") or annihilation.

Because of some of my personal experiences involving the death of my father, Kimball McKee (1951-1992), and my own salvation testimony (1995), I have always been theologically and philosophically

intrigued about matters of death, the afterlife, as well as human composition. While I do not deny how my experiences have affected my approach to these issues, I think it is also fair to say that I have sufficiently investigated these matters, from both the Biblical text and a fair modicum of scholarship. Shortly after graduating from Asbury Theological Seminary (2009), I gave the topics of the intermediate state and eternal punishment, a much deeper treatment than I ever had before—specifically as I was able to employ new exegetical skills and theological tools.

Prior to my studies, I had a very under-developed view of afterlife matters. Much of what I believed about either going to Heaven or Hell, was the result of some religious dogma; prior to the early 2000s, I had not

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conducted any detailed examination of various theological perspectives, original language issues, and certainly had not probed related matters of human personhood. The release of the two main studies in this publication, discussing the intermediate state and eternal punishment, have been received somewhat well over the years. But I can also say that there have been many, when asking me about my investigation and research, who have not at all been interested in reviewing what I have compiled.

Anyone, who is honest in their reading of the Bible, should be able to recognize how the intended salvation trajectory, of the redeemed in Messiah, is *not* to just die and float off as some disembodied soul to Heaven. The intended salvation trajectory of the redeemed in Messiah is to exist in a fully embodied, immortal state, in the New Creation. Yet, due to a great deal of popular and incorrect preaching, this is something which has been sadly lost on many of today's contemporary evangelical Protestants. It is lamentably true how, when thinking about death, far too many of your average Christians think of it in entirely individualistic terms—that of going to Heaven when they die, to see Jesus and their loved ones—and they have very little concept of the Second Coming, resurrection of the dead, Millennial Kingdom and restoration of Israel, and the Eternal State. But in order to return Believers to the foundational truth of future resurrection, it is hardly required to insist upon total unconsciousness in the grave, between death and resurrection.

My own theological investigation, into the intermediate state between death and resurrection, has been affected by some of the traditional views I would have encountered growing up in the evangelicalism in the 1980s and 1990s,¹ but not exclusively so. The thrust, of the Holy Scriptures for the people of God, is most certainly focused on what is to take place subsequent to the future resurrection, and the incumbent New Creation.² *I have agreed with advocates of psychopannychy, that there needs to be a greater emphasis on the future resurrection and Kingdom of God.*

At the same time, there are many questions of human personhood and uniqueness, which have been insufficiently answered, or just flat avoided, in my interactions with many advocates of psychopannychy.

¹ Much of this approach is represented by Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984); Bruce Milne, *The Message of Heaven & Hell* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).

² Like many, I have greatly appreciated many of the thoughts offered by N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

What does it mean for a human being to bear the image of God? Is a human being a creature solely of this dimension, or does a human being actually possess something from another dimension? When a human being dies, what happens to the core person of memory, creativity, and experience? If a human being is solely a material entity, at the resurrection will the genuine person who once lived a life on Earth, truly live again—or will a copy or facsimile of that person be recreated? In my experience, too many supporters of psychopannychy are not too willing to acknowledge, or perhaps even engage, with these sorts of factors. For me, I believe it is philosophically required for the essential, core person to survive biological death in some way, in order for a genuine resurrection of that person to occur in the future. So, I have seen no substantial reason to deny a temporary, disembodied afterlife, in another dimension, before the resurrection.³

In terms of the uncomfortable and greatly unhappy subject of eternal punishment, I think it is safe to say that most of us would prefer to believe in either annihilationism or universal salvation. Annihilationism, the view that the condemned will suffer eternal extinction from existence, is notably on the map of theological options from Second Temple Judaism—just as is some form of an ongoing, eternal punishment.⁴ I have had to certainly work through various approaches and theological debates, seen among those who support either annihilationism or a never-ending model of eternal punishment, something which I never did until I was a seminary student (2005-2009).

As I have seen it, many who now identify as annihilationists, often once believed in the most terrible form of a never-ending eternal punishment imaginable: having to suffer in a hyper-literal Hell or Lake of Fire, burning in an everlasting crematory, breathing in toxic fumes, and drinking poisonous acid. The metaphorical view of eternal punishment, which has been the position throughout a great deal of historical Protestant theology—looking at the diverse images of fire, smoke, brimstone, and outer

³ A further review of what may be termed “wholistic dualism” is offered by John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

⁴ Consult the investigations offered by Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995); William V. Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds. *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

darkness, as symbols of everlasting exile from God’s presence—is something which does not get enough attention in the discussion. Frequently it is not even acknowledged.

Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics have never believed or supported psychopannychy or annihilation. But I do not believe that these views are necessarily heresy, either. I think that those who support these views can be, rather, often one-dimensional and lacking in their scope of investigation. My experience over the past fifteen years or so (since 2009), is that when people have a need to reevaluate their views in these areas, they will. It has always been my intention to be as fair as I can be, recognizing how there are many strong emotions involved.

But how have I seen the discussion develop, now in the mid-2020s?

Status of the Afterlife in Messianic Judaism

A great deal of contemporary Messianic Judaism has held to the customary views of death and the afterlife I was reared with in evangelicalism: Believers in Yeshua die and go to Heaven to be with Him, non-Believers will spend eternity separated from Him in Hell.⁵ One’s Messianic Jewish experience, in talking about the afterlife, may also include giving credence to the views of people who claim to have had out of body experiences, and/or claim to have spent some time in Hell.⁶ Unfortunately, forms of Platonic dualism and various popular Christian views of the afterlife, are seen in much of Messianic Judaism. But this hardly means that there are not, at times, ongoing discussions and debates.

At the 2016 MJAA Heartland Regional Conference in Grapevine, TX, I delivered a message entitled “Let’s Talk About Death,” loosely based on some of the material in this publication. It mainly dealt with philosophy of personhood questions, and how a temporary, disembodied afterlife, assures us that the person to be resurrected is the same genuine person who had previously lived a life on Earth. On the whole, while some were able to follow the argument, the attendees had never really been exposed to this kind, or even level, of reasoning before.

At my own local congregation, where I have been a member for the

⁵ Consult Daniel Juster, *Heaven, Hell, and the Afterlife: What the Bible Teaches* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2017).

⁶ Consult Jonathan Bernis, *A Rabbi Looks at the Afterlife* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2014).

past decade (2014-2024), Eitz Chaim of Plano, TX, when Rabbi David Schiller has overseen various funerals and memorial services—they have included a combination of traditional Jewish liturgy, and Bible readings you would expect in a customary evangelical Protestant setting. Among the different Scripture passages read at a funeral and/or gravesite, have included: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Psalm 16; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Isaiah 26:19; Job 19:25-27; Psalm 139:7-18, 23-24; Psalm 27; 1 Corinthians 15:51-58; Revelation 2:1-7. My local congregational experience over the past ten years, has largely been one where a temporary, disembodied afterlife before resurrection, and a model of a never-ending eternal punishment, have both been affirmed. On the whole, my local congregational experience, has been quite theologically compatible with the views represented in this publication.

In the wider, ongoing Messianic Jewish theological experience, there is very little out there to report on—mainly because discussions on death, the afterlife, and eternal punishment tend to be experiential to one’s local congregation and/or various conference level events. From what I have encountered, in my ongoing discussions and interactions, is how there is at least one Messianic Jewish theologian, who has expressed an open-mindedness to monism, in contrast to Platonic dualism.⁷ I have also encountered (2023) a Messianic Jewish rabbi openly express support for annihilationism, encouraging other rabbis and leaders to read the classic annihilationist work *The Fire That Consumes* by Edward William Fudge.⁸ At times, one will hear reports and rumors about some Messianic Jewish rabbi or leader, expressing a level of support for universalism, mainly because he believes that at least all Jewish people, in the end, will experience God’s salvation.

As time moves on, none of us should be surprised to see a number of new Messianic Jewish rabbis and leaders, at least be open-minded and more tolerant of psychopannychy and annihilationism. It is also guaranteed that there will be discussions and debates over universalism.

⁷ Jennifer M. Rosner, *Finding Messiah: A Journey into the Jewishness of the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2022), pp 76-78, 211.

⁸ Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: The Biblical Case for Conditional Immortality* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1994).

Status of the Afterlife in the Hebrew Roots Movement and Other Groups

It is not difficult to discern how a significant majority of the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, in the mid-2020s, adheres to some model of psychopannychy (“soul sleep”) and annihilation. This is something which has been witnessed in books intended for broad distribution,⁹ as well as in various teaching series provided by popular Internet channels.¹⁰ One of the main reasons for seeing many people in the Hebrew Roots movement, openly embrace the concept of total unconsciousness between death and resurrection, is to somehow reemphasize the Bible’s focus on future resurrection and permanent embodiment for the redeemed. Yet other reasons, which are frequently witnessed in the Hebrew Roots movement, include over-stated claims that “going to Heaven when you die” is something pagan or Hellenistic. Hebrew Roots teachers seldom, if ever, actually engage with the actual philosophical views of Hellenistic dualism—much less any of the factors involving human composition and personhood. The Hebrew Roots movement is well known for not being too scholastically engaged, and so as I have interacted with those within the Hebrew Roots sphere of influence over the years—many of them have not been too interested in consulting the analysis provided by a resource such as this.

While it should not be surprising to see those within the Hebrew Roots movement, adhere to beliefs such as psychopannychy and annihilation—what about some of the other sectors out there? In the past (1990s -2010s), it was widely witnessed that the major voice of the One Law/One Torah sub-movement, Tim Hegg of TorahResource, widely adhered to more-or-less traditional views regarding the intermediate state and eternal punishment, consistent with his Reformed theological background. However, his son Caleb Hegg and co-host Rob Vanhoff, of the podcast Messiah Matters, are seen to conclude (2023) that there is apparently not enough information in the Holy Scriptures, to actually know what happens after death and before the resurrection.¹¹ It should be anticipated

⁹ A significant example of this is Lex Meyer, *Immortal: The Truth About Heaven, Hell, and the Resurrection* (Author: 2015).

¹⁰ A significant example of this the “Life After Death series” offered by 119 Ministries, accessible via <youtube.com/@119Ministries/>.

¹¹ Consult Messiah Matters, “#453 – The Gospel.” (13 December, 2023). Available online via <youtube.com/@MessiahMatters/>.

that the still-emerging Pronomian Christian movement, is likely to have more supporters of psychopannychy and annihilation, than not.

Further Developments on the Afterlife

Issues involving the afterlife, intermediate state, resurrection, and eternal punishment, continue to be discussed and debated in evangelical Protestant theology. It is notable that a second edition of Zondervan's *Four Views on Hell* was released (2016), with new contributors.¹² A very interesting, related volume, *Four Views on Heaven*, is also available (2022).¹³ Another publication of some interest, may be *40 Questions About Heaven and Hell* by Alan W. Gomes (2018).¹⁴ On the whole, these examinations are useful to evaluate the current status of various afterlife matters, per the questions being asked in much of evangelicalism. Messianic persons who have only just learned about some of the major theological factors involving the afterlife—perhaps by examining this publication—can access these sorts of materials for further investigation.

One notable evangelical publication, which has received some circulation in various Messianic quarters, has been *Being God's Image* by Carmen Joy Imes (2023). While this is mainly a book focused on what it means for human beings to be created in God's image, their uniqueness, and their special purpose—and it is not mainly focused on death and afterlife questions—Imes does directly address some of the negative theological and spiritual fallout of Hellenistic dualism. The focus of God's people is not to be one of floating away to Heaven for endless disembodiment, but instead is to be on the arrival of the New Earth. This is to directly affect the purpose and activity of the people of God today on Earth.¹⁵

The three main, ongoing factors, which any leader, teacher, or individual, investigating the topic of the afterlife, will have to seriously consider, include

¹² Preston Sprinkle, gen. ed., *Four Views on Hell*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

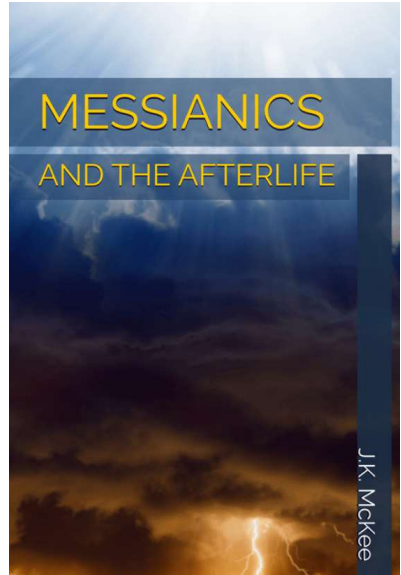
¹³ Michael E. Wittmer, gen. ed., *Four Views on Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022).

¹⁴ Alan W. Gomes, *40 Questions About Heaven and Hell* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018).

¹⁵ Carmen Joy Imes, *Being God's Image: Why Creation Still Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023), pp 164-180.

1. **philosophy of personhood:** Is a human being an entity which is entirely material, or is a human being composed of both material and immaterial elements? Is a human being quantitatively indifferent, or different, from the animals at large? How can one be assured that at the future resurrection, the human being to be resurrected, is the same one who had authentically lived a life on Earth—or will he or she be some kind of duplicate, clone, or facsimile?
2. **the metaphorical view of eternal punishment:** How much of the growing acceptance of annihilation, the view that the condemned will suffer extinction from existence, can be traced to people responding to a hyper-literal view of Hell and the Lake of Fire? How few people have actually considered the metaphorical view of eternal punishment—which views descriptions such as fire, smoke, brimstone, *and* outer darkness, as symbols of its severity—but ultimately representative as everlasting exile from God’s presence?
3. **the body ministry concern:** Many people do hold to improper, popular beliefs about death, such as their loved ones somehow offering prayers for them in Heaven. At the same time, many people who believe that their loved ones are in Heaven, absolutely affirm the reality of the future resurrection and Second Coming of Yeshua to Planet Earth. How do leaders and teachers, in ministering to those who grieve—individuals, families, and congregations—better communicate that an intermediate state in Heaven is not the main focus of the Scriptures? The focus of the Scriptures is the Kingdom of God coming to Earth, and the Messiah reigning from Jerusalem.

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.