

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Daniel 3:25: I have heard it said that Yeshua was present with the three men in the fiery furnace. To what degree might this be true?

The three Jews: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were thrown into the fiery furnace for not worshipping the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had erected. So serious was the fire, and so obstinate were they to his demand, that the crematory was heated seven times more than normal (Daniel 3:19). The three faithful Jews were bound so that they could not escape (Daniel 3:21), and as they were thrown in, some of the soldiers guarding them were actually killed by flames coming out of the oven (Daniel 3:23). As they are cast into the fire, King Nebuchadnezzar makes some startling observations.

“Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, ‘Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?’ They replied to the king, ‘Certainly, O king.’ He said, ‘Look! I see four men loosed *and* walking *about* in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of *the* gods!’”

It is not difficult at all to see how a supernatural being saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego from certain doom in the furnace. Jewish Bible translations render v. 25 with either “the fourth looks like a divine being” (NJPS) or “the appearance of the fourth [one] is like an angel’s” (ATS). But what is specifically meant by the Aramaic clause *l'var-Elahin* (לְבָרֵי אֱלֹהִין)? The Septuagint translators could not agree, with one LXX version rendering it *angelou Theou* (ἄγγελου θεοῦ) or “angel of God,” and then another with *huiō Theou* (υἱὸ θεοῦ) or “son of God.”

Older English translations like the KJV employ “Son of God,” and hence various interpreters have concluded that not just any supernatural being was present with the three faithful Jews in the fiery furnace—but that it was a pre-Incarnate manifestation of Yeshua the Messiah. Most modern English translations today render *l'var-Elahin* in Daniel 3:25 as “like a son of the gods” (i.e., RSV, NASU, NIV, HCSB) or “the appearance of a god” (NRSV). It is often translated this way not necessarily to discount Yeshua as the Son of God, but rather to consider the vantage point of the person who made this declaration: the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar would have thought of any supernatural being as just another deity, because it is not until the narrative of Daniel 4 that he had his significant counter with the One True God.

When he saw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego saved from the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar would have had no comprehension of a Messiah to come, or any Savior/Redeemer figure prophesied to rescue Israel as seen in the Tanach. King Nebuchadnezzar was simply a person in history who witnessed God’s deliverance in action. Based on his statements, it is not incorrect to conclude that this *bar-Elahin* was in fact a pre-Incarnate manifestation of *the Son of God*, Yeshua the Messiah. Yet when this took place, the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, armed nothing with nothing more than his pagan theology, would not have understood this.

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Death, for Believers: What do you believe happens when born again Believers die?

We believe that the disembodied consciousnesses of Believers who die in the faith are transported to Heaven to be with the Lord. This is fully consistent with what the Apostles write to us in the Messianic Scriptures and the beliefs of First Century Pharisaical Judaism, which largely advocated an intermediate afterlife prior to the resurrection. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” The Greek verb that Paul uses for “be at home with,” *endēmeō* (ἐνδημέω), actually means “To be at home, to be present in any place or with any person,” relating to “one who is at

home with...or among his own people” (AMG).^a Being separated from one’s physical body thus requires a Believer to be present with the Lord.

Paul also writes in Philippians 1:23, “But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Messiah, for *that* is very much better,” but expressing his need to remain on Earth a little longer to perform the Lord’s work. Further on in this same epistle, Paul writes that “our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Yeshua the Messiah” (Philippians 3:20). He wants to die and be in the presence of His Savior, yet clearly recognizes how Yeshua will ultimately come to restore the Earth. The Believer’s ultimate place of residence is not a Heaven far off in the sky, but in the restored Kingdom of God on Earth. Heaven is the intermediate place to be with the Lord prior to the resurrection of a Believer’s body.

As a ministry, we fully denounce any form of “soul sleep” for the righteous, as it is only the Believer’s dead body that is “asleep,” awaiting for reunification with the consciousness at the resurrection. **We fully affirm the reality of a bodily resurrection!** An intermediate afterlife assures us beyond any doubt that the person who is resurrected, is the same authentic person who had lived a life on Earth—and not some replica or facsimile of the person.

Those in the Messianic community who believe in “soul sleep” often base it on half-verses such as Ecclesiastes 9:5b, which says “the dead do not know anything.” Yet this is not definitive evidence of no conscious afterlife, as the verse continues describing human life on Earth, and how the dead do not know of any Earth-bound things: “their memory is forgotten. Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:5c-6). Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 does not say anything about the condition of dead persons or where they are, but instead lists specific things that they cannot do because they are dead. These are things that these people had time to participate in on Earth or “under the sun” (Heb. *tachat ha'shamesh*, תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ), but cannot participate in beyond the veil of death, hence not “knowing” about them.

It is insufficient for any interpreter, as can be quite commonplace among Messianic advocates of “soul sleep,” to only consider references in the Tanach without also weighing them with statements in the Apostolic Scriptures. The Tanach really does not even ask the question about life after death, because it is more widely concerned with the *corporate* nature of God’s people and their conduct on Earth, whereas questions of an afterlife are widely *individualistic*. Because the Tanach does not really ask the question, it is not addressed to the same degree as it is in the Apostolic Scriptures. But still, that does not mean that the Tanach is entirely silent about an afterlife. One cannot really “die,” and then be “gathered to his people” (Genesis 25:8; 35:29; 49:33; Numbers 20:24, 26; Deuteronomy 32:50), unless one is gathered *somewhere*. It by no means speaks exclusively of internment in a family tomb. When Jacob died, he “was gathered to his people” (Genesis 49:33), but he was not actually buried for quite some time (Genesis 50:2-14). Moses is said to have been “gathered to your people” (Deuteronomy 32:50), but he was interred in an unmarked gravesite (Deuteronomy 34:6), certainly not being united with his ancestors’ remains in a family tomb.

There are certainly strong clues given in the Tanach of a temporary, disembodied state as one of the “shades” in Sheol or the netherworld (i.e., Isaiah 14:9).

The development of a theology of afterlife across the Biblical period is no more irregular or strange than the development of Messianism, which took multiple millennia (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2), or even the doctrine of resurrection itself which is scantily alluded to *directly* in the Tanach (Daniel 12:1-2). All three of these strata largely came to their peak in Pharisaic Judaism, which significantly affected the development of the early Messianic movement.

For a further discussion of this issue, consult the editor’s articles “**To Be Absent From the Body**” and “**Why Hell Must Be Eternal**.” Also recommended are the books *Death and the Afterlife* by Robert A. Morey, and *Bible, Soul & Life Everlasting* by John W. Cooper.

updated 06 May, 2008

^a Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 585.

Death, as an unconscious sleep: Death is described as a sleep in the Bible. Would this not imply complete unconsciousness until the resurrection?

Those who advocate a conscious, disembodied, post-mortem state for the deceased between death and the resurrection, usually have to deal with proponents of psychopannychy, more commonly known as “soul sleep.” Psychopannychists believe that between death and the resurrection, the human person exists in a completely unconscious state. They often claim strong support for this from a variety of Biblical passages that describe the deceased as existing in a condition of “sleep.” These include, but are not limited to:

“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2).

“Consider *and* answer me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the *sleep of* death” (Psalm 13:3).

“This He said, and after that He said to them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep’” (John 11:11).

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51).

“For if we believe that Yeshua died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Yeshua” (1 Thessalonians 4:14).^a

Does the description of the deceased as “sleeping” really mean complete unconsciousness? It should certainly go without saying that it is *entirely inappropriate* to equate any human death labeled as “sleep” as being the same as putting an animal suffering great pain, “to sleep.” It should also not escape our notice that when people go to sleep every night, they are most always not entirely unconscious; for the most part those who get a normal 6-8 hours of sleep at night are semi-conscious, experiencing a degree of either dreaming and/or other mental activity. Among people today when they use colloquial expressions like “I want to go to sleep and not wake up,” it does at all mean that they desire to fall asleep and just die, as much as it means that people do not want insomnia and they want to get a full night’s rest. Likewise, with any living person in a condition of “rest” today, in largely being just inactive or trying to do very little in terms of activity, such a state of “rest” can by no means be used as a support for complete unconsciousness. Sitting on a lounge chair near a beach or a pool, in an exotic location—“resting”—by no means requires a total *unawareness* of one’s surroundings.

What is the vantage point of “sleep” for the deceased really intended to convey to other living persons, especially survivors of those who have lost a loved one? Might a description of sleep actually be intended to imply that a deceased person’s body or mortal remains—while currently inactive or dormant—will one day be active again? Frequently, those who believe in a temporary, disembodied afterlife respond to psychopannychists’ claim that the deceased being “asleep” must mean unconsciousness, by saying that only a deceased person’s *body* is asleep. In the anthropology of Hellenistic or Platonic dualism, the human body was often perceived as the prison for the human soul, and the body was to be cast off at the time of death as a one-time lodging for a person—often as trash or garbage to be thrown away (sometimes cremated and scattered into the wind). In an anthropology of holistic dualism, the mortal remains of someone are to be interred in an honorable manner in either a cemetery, crypt, or burial vault, and at the

^a To these passages can be added: 1 Kings 2:10; 11:43; 14:31; Matthew 27:52; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Corinthians 15:6, 18, 20; 2 Peter 3:4.

time of resurrection they will be reanimated with the departed consciousness returning to the body.

Those who believe in a temporary disembodied afterlife have always been aware of the various passages in Scripture that describe death as a “sleep.” The clear challenge, is that the psychopannychist or “soul sleep” advocate prefers to set one set of Biblical passages against another. Those verses that imply some degree of post-mortem, disembodied conscious activity for the deceased in another dimension (i.e., Isaiah 14:9-10; Luke 16:23-31; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Revelation 6:9) have to either be allegorized or ignored. In many cases, psychopannychists can be shown in pitting one selection of Biblical passages against another, a fairly typical liberal hermeneutic (one which often takes place in the debate like that over homosexuality). Responsible, conservative interpreters are called to hold the integrity of *all Biblical passages* together. J.A. Motyer is right to assert, “the ‘sleep’ metaphor must be balanced by those other descriptions which imply a conscious, living state,”^b after the time of a person’s death and before resurrection.

While advocates of soul sleep are keen to ignore or radically rework the implication of verses such as “we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8), or “I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Messiah, for *that* is very much better” (Philippians 1:23), those who believe in a temporary, disembodied afterlife—especially for the redeemed in Heaven—before the resurrection, do not so easily try to dismiss the various passages describing death as “sleep.” In the estimation of N.T. Wright,

“Though [death] is sometimes described as sleep, we shouldn’t take this to mean that it is a state of unconsciousness. Had Paul thought that, I very much doubt that he would have described life immediately after death as ‘being with Christ, which is far better’ [Philippians 1:23]. Rather, *sleep* here means that the *body* is ‘asleep’ in the sense of ‘dead,’ while the real person—however we want to describe him or her—continues.”^c

Wright also observes how,

“[S]ome interpreters...speak of ‘the sleep of the soul’, a time of unconscious post-mortem existence prior to the reawakening of the resurrection...In fact, if we were speaking strictly, we should say that it is the *body* that ‘sleeps’ between death and resurrection; but in all probability Paul is using the language of sleeping and waking simply as a way of contrasting a state of temporary inactivity, not necessarily unconsciousness, with a subsequent one of new activity.”^d

Principally, the description of death being like “sleep” is to largely serve as comfort to a survivor who has lost a loved one. When the corpse of a family member or friend is viewed (at least for identification purposes) for the final time before internment (frequently by the custom of “visitation”), the deceased person’s body is to be still very much be treated as “him” or “her,” even though the consciousness has left for another dimension (*hopefully* being with the Lord in Heaven). Realizing that a body is “asleep,” should cause those who are left behind to treat it with great respect and dignity, as such a body will most certainly live again at the resurrection! The closest that any survivor can get to a departed loved one is, after all, his or her burial site in a cemetery.

In terms of what a deceased person actually does after death, in a disembodied condition in another dimension, the Scriptures tell us very little about. Various clues present in the Word do suggest that the deceased do exist in some kind of restful or semi-conscious mode. When the spirit of Samuel is called up from the netherworld, Samuel’s statement “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” (1 Samuel 28:15), is an indication that while in Sheol he was doing very little, although he was not totally unaware of his surroundings. Likewise, when the departed king of Babylon is cast out of his tomb and into Sheol, he is told, “Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet

^b J.A. Motyer, *After Death: What Happens When You Die?* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 1996), 107.

^c N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 171.

^d N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 216.

you when you come, it rouses the shades to greet you” (Isaiah 14:9, RSV). The various kings who preceded the Babylonian monarch in death are not unconscious, but neither are they as active as they would have been on Earth during their reigns. Even in the account of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31, the righteous deceased in Abraham’s bosom do not seem to be doing that much, although they are in a conscious condition of rest and refreshment and pleasantness.

All of this should lead us to conclude that while a deceased person’s body or mortal remains are “asleep” somewhere on Earth until the resurrection, the departed consciousness of the deceased are likely in some kind of semi-conscious condition—but not one where all activity and contemplation have ceased. The observation of Qohelet is, “for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10), principally because all of the Earth-bound opportunities to work, plan for a future, receive an education, and become wise via experience will all *be over*. This is precisely because the deceased “will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:6), meaning life on Earth. Whether one goes to an intermediate Heaven or Hell prior to the resurrection, neither the righteous or unrighteous have to work to make a living for themselves, or hold down a job to pay bills. Bruce Milne’s observations concur that this involves,

“[R]est from labour, easing of responsibility, abstraction from immediate involvement in events, a different kind of awareness and, perhaps most important of all, the certainty of reawakening at a future point. While not saying everything, it draws attention to the relative passivity of the intermediate state.”^e

Why psychopannychists strongly insist, if not contentiously protest sometimes, that death is an unconscious sleep—when there are various Biblical examples available of post-mortem, disembodied conscious activity—is largely unknown. We cannot fully ascertain their spiritual motives, if they truly are Believers in Yeshua, why when they die they do not want to be immediately transported into the presence of the Messiah in Heaven.^f Theologically speaking, though, when psychopannychists strongly insist that death is a completely unconscious sleep until the resurrection, and that humans are entirely physical beings with no compositional connection to another dimension, it is easy to see that they are not as careful as they should be in supplying various “proof texts” for their position. Some of the passages provided to support that “death is an unconscious sleep” can actually be interpreted as being *anti-resurrection*, the very doctrine that they think they are trying to defend:

“By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

“So man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no longer, he will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep. Oh that You would hide me in Sheol, that You would conceal me until Your wrath returns *to You*, that You would set a limit for me and remember me!” (Job 14:12-13).

“Thus He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and does not return” (Psalm 78:39).

“When they become heated up, I will serve *them* their banquet and make them drunk, that they may become jubilant and may sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake up,’ declares the LORD. I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams together with male goats” (Jeremiah 51:39-40).

No advocate of “soul sleep,” who to their strong credit does affirm a doctrine of future bodily resurrection, would say that a claim such as, “people are laid to rest and do not rise again” (Job 14, NLT) or “sleep forever [*sh’nat-olam*, שְׁנַת עוֹלָם] and not awake” (Jeremiah 51:39, NIV), are

^e Bruce Milne, *The Message of Heaven & Hell* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 172.

^f Be sure to consult the FAQ “Afterlife, negates need for resurrection.”

definitive statements to be read isolated from the remainder of the Scriptures. If taken by itself, a passage like Jeremiah 51:39 *could* be read as being anti-resurrection. But in this case, the fact that Babylon is the subject (Jeremiah 51:37), and its judgment is its view, needs to be kept in mind. Likewise, what is likely to suffer from a never-ending sleep is the Babylonian Empire, as opposed to the individuals in the Babylonian army, its aristocracy, or its royal court. Still, the point should be taken that a simplistic reading of Scripture passages is not warranted, as those who believe in a disembodied afterlife prior to the resurrection have not just picked through passages that support their position, while ignoring verses that describe death as a condition of “sleep.”

Those who are sincerely convicted that the Bible teaches a conscious, disembodied intermediate state between death and the resurrection, are aware of how many details are *not* given to us of this time (aside from being with the Lord like 2 Corinthians 5:8 or Philippians 1:23, or returning with the Lord from Heaven like 1 Thessalonians 3:13). *Specific* factors of the intermediate state not communicated to us are not at all to be interpreted as some kind of a denial of it, but are to support the reality that individuals living on Planet Earth today serving God, are to reach out *in total faith* toward Him—in both prayer and action—and are largely prohibited to contemplate what their deceased loved ones who knew Him are presently doing in Heaven (cf. Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:11), other than being a part of the company of appeal that demands a soon return of Yeshua to the Earth (cf. Revelation 6:9-10).

To a degree, the condition of our departed loved ones in Heaven might be semi-conscious, because for the redeemed it is to certainly be a period of rest and refreshment (cf. Luke 23:43). For the righteous, the intermediate condition of their bodies or mortal remains is something akin to “sleeping” on Earth, and it is surely also not to be a time of “work” in Heaven. In our limited human language, our departed loved ones who knew the Lord and are presently with Him in Heaven, are—for lack of better terminology—probably on a kind of “extended vacation.” When the Scriptures describe death as a “sleep” for Messiah followers, it is with the expressed intention to demonstrate that God is not at all finished with the human body or mortal remains, and that such a body will surely be awakened and reanimated at the time of the Messiah’s return.

This should not only encourage those who have to deal with the death of a loved one to treat his or her corpse with respect, but also recognize—above all else—that the return of Yeshua to the Earth not only insures survivors that they will be able to embrace the body of a loved one again, **but that all of the physical promises of a restored Israel will be accomplished.** More than anything else, the future resurrection of the dead is proof that the Lord Yeshua’s Millennial Kingdom will establish Jerusalem as the capital of Planet Earth, defeating all of Israel’s enemies, *and* that Messiah followers will not just move from death to a pleasant and peaceful condition in His presence after death, with nothing else to really follow.

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Denying Messiah: Why do you think there are people in the Messianic movement today, who are denying Yeshua as the Messiah?

It needs to be remembered that denial of the Lord Yeshua (Jesus) has been occurring for centuries, although in today’s Messianic movement, it does often sit a little too close to home because of our small size.

There are a variety of reasons why some people in the Messianic movement are denying Yeshua as the Messiah. The first reason is that apostasy from the faith is prophesied to take place in the Last Days (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4).^a The second reason is that there are a variety of deceptive books and websites, labeled as being “Messianic,” which (deliberately) plant seeds of doubt into the minds of people. The third reason is that it is likely that many people who are denying Yeshua’s Divinity,^b and then His Messiahship,^c *never* truly knew Him as their Personal Savior.

^a Consult the editor’s article “The Great Apostasy.”

^b Consult the editor’s article “Answering the ‘Frequently Avoided Questions’ About the Divinity of Yeshua.”

One pattern that is very dangerous is the idea that one must “question everything.” While there should surely be wisdom and discernment exercised when approaching a topic or issue, many of those who teach that one must “question everything” have not considered the full ramifications of what they say. Eventually a person will ask questions that cannot be answered, and the result can be a denial of Yeshua and ultimately denial of the existence of God as Creator. The Biblical pattern is *not* to “question everything,” but rather to seek confirmation of an important matter (Deuteronomy 17:16; 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; Titus 5:19; Hebrews 10:28).

updated 31 August, 2011

^c Consult the editor's article “Answering the ‘Frequently Avoided Questions’ About the Messiahship of Yeshua.”

Deuteronomy 6:25: I heard a Messianic teacher say that if I keep the Torah perfectly not only will I be able to be saved, I will also be able to never get sick or die of diseases like cancer? Can you help clarify this for me?

In Deuteronomy 6:24-25, one finds a statement of commitment made on the part of the Ancient Israelites. They declare before God,

“So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as *it is* today. It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us.”

V. 24 makes the obvious observation that God’s commandments are obeyed “for our lasting good and for our survival” (NJPS), or “so that we might always prosper and be kept alive” (NIV). This is because the Torah provides safeguards that are intended to keep God’s people secure and industrious, thus allowing them to live lives where they can prosper. And truly, any society that has taken the Torah’s code of ethics and morality to serious heart has benefited immensely from what it is intended to provide.

V. 25 is a bit more complicated, as the Ancient Israelites do say to the Lord *u’tzedaqah tih’yeh lanu* (וְצַדִּיקָהּ תִּהְיֶה לָנוּ), “and righteousness it is for us” (YLT) if they were to observe all of God’s commandments. To some people, this might present the opportunity that if one were to observe all of God’s commandments, then it is possible to be righteous on the basis of such Torah-keeping or Law-keeping. Yet, if this is a possibility, then it is also notable that *nowhere in Biblical history* was Ancient Israel ever able to do this. The testimony of the Tanach (and even much of the Torah itself) is clear evidence that a fallen human person is incapable of living up to the requirement of v. 25 (cf. Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Romans 3:10). This is why a Divine Redeemer, Yeshua the Messiah, is understood in Romans 10:4 to be the *telos...nomou...eis dikaiosunēn* (τέλος...νόμου...εἰς δικαιοσύνην) or “the goal of the Torah for righteousness” (editor’s translation). Those desiring the righteousness the Torah requires of God’s people must look to Yeshua as the source (Philippians 3:9).

There is another view of Deuteronomy 6:25 which need not be overlooked. The Hebrew *tzedaqah* (צִדְקָה) or “righteousness” has *corporate* dimensions that concern all of God’s people. Having *tzedaqah* in this case would not regard being individually “righteous” or “justified,” but simply being in covenant membership with the Lord and with other members of His community. TWOT explains some often overlooked aspects of this term,

“The covenant or theocratic aspect involves the nation of Israel, the covenant requires obedience to God by the nation and is the way of his people (Psa 1:1-6; Deut 6:25), a way of righteousness. God is righteous, under the covenant, when he delivers his people from trouble (Psa 31:1), their enemies (Psa 5:8), the wicked (Psa 37:6) and when he is vindicating Israel before her foes or executing vengeance on them (Jer 11:20). It is appropriate that Israel be assured of ultimate victory over her foes (Isa 54:14-17). In this last event the Lord is both righteous and the savior (Isa 45:21).”^a

From this point of view, the affirmation on Israel’s part to keep the Torah’s commandments is a reflection on the fact that they will be identified as God’s people by their obedience to Him. By obeying God’s commandments, the Torah was to provide Israel with a society that was safe and prosperous and thus have “righteousness”—a corporate identification of being His people and being preserved by Him.

Any Messianic teacher today who says that individuals can be righteous just by keeping the Torah is ignoring the whole of Scripture. While the standard of obeying God perfectly is placed before us, it is not something that fallen man is capable of doing. This does not mean that such a standard should be ignored, **but it undoubtedly forces us to Yeshua because of our human incapacity to keep it perfectly.**

^a Harold G. Stigers, “צִדְקָה,” in TWOT, 2:754.

Perhaps what has been avoided more than anything else, is how the righteousness of Deuteronomy 6:25 is to be manifested on a corporate scale. Is today's Messianic movement desiring to be a faith community where the *shalom* of the Lord prevails, and we can live out all of those imperatives that the Torah calls us to? This is a question that often goes unasked in today's Messianic world. If we were to have this status, then we would be far more united as His people, and far more cognizant of the significant issues in the Torah that we often avoid but the world certainly needs to be made aware of.

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Dictionaries/Lexicons: Can you recommend any specific Hebrew and Greek dictionaries or lexicons I can use in my Bible studies?

There are many varied Hebrew and Greek lexicons available, some of them are excellent, others are good, and then some are substandard. As a lay person, there are some which we recommend that you have that can be fairly easy to use without extensive Hebrew or Greek training.

Two widely available Hebrew and Greek dictionaries, that you should have in your library, are *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (BDB) and *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Thayer). These two lexicons, even though they are about 100 years old, offer standard definitions and usages of Hebrew and Greek words. Newer editions of them are keyed to Strong's Concordance numbers, which should make words easier to find than having to look them up in alphabetical order in either Hebrew or Greek.

A valuable Hebrew resource that we recommend is the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT), which is extremely thorough in its explanation of Hebrew words. Another commonly used resource is *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*. With *Vine*, words can be easily looked up as English references, with various Hebrew or Greek equivalents listed under them.

Two other valuable resources that we recommend are the *Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, and *Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, both produced by AMG Publishers. They are quite easily to use if you are untrained in the Biblical languages.

For those, however, who want to use the premier Hebrew and Greek lexicons available today, please note that they require a working knowledge of the Biblical languages. *A Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT) by Koehler and Baumgartner has been recently republished in a 2-volume student size edition, and works well with *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (CHALOT) edited by Holladay. The best Greek lexicon on the market today by far is *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Ardt, Gingrich) or *BDAG*. Lidell & Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* is also a valuable resource, although its primary focus is on non-Biblical Greek literature. All of these lexicons require you to look up the words alphabetically in Hebrew or Greek.

Consult the editor's article "[Getting Beyond Strong's Concordance](#)" for further details.

updated 16 November, 2006

Dietary Laws, Kosher: Do you believe that the dietary commandments of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are still applicable to Believers?

Messianic Believers think that in obedience to God we should follow the Biblical dietary commandments that He has laid out in His Word—and that they were not annulled by Yeshua the Messiah or the Apostles, nor in the vision of the Apostle Peter in Acts 10. Although eating kosher is not an issue of salvation, it is an area of belief where the Messianic movement does run contrary to the position of mainstream Christianity.

For a further study into this issue, and a response to the claims against eating kosher, we recommend that you consult the editor's articles "To Eat or Not to Eat?" and "How Do We Properly Keep Kosher?"

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Doctors, and Modern Medicine: I have encountered some teachings from Messianics which condemn the usage of modern medicine. What is your opinion on this? Do you have a problem with Believers consulting modern medical doctors?

Those who do not consult medical doctors, be they Messianic *or* Christian, often do so from the theological presupposition that going to the doctor is a so-called "lack of faith," and that all physical problems are likely caused by one's spiritual condition. These beliefs or opinions are usually those of a small few, and do not by any means represent a majority in the Messianic movement. As a ministry, we do not condemn consulting medical doctors or modern medicine. Luke himself, author of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, was a medical doctor. It is for that reason why in his Gospel he painstakingly describes the physical act of the crucifixion of Yeshua.

With this said, while we would never condemn anyone for consulting a medical doctor, it is safe to say that not all physical ailments need be remedied with modern medicine. Eating properly and exercising regularly are absolutely needed for proper health, and are often the solution for many problems that some believe will only be solved by a "pill."

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Dreams and Visions: What is your position on dreams and visions?

Joel 2:28 clearly tells us that in the Last Days the Lord will pour out His Spirit upon "all flesh/mankind," but yet we also know that there will be intense deception and apostasy. Many have claimed to see visions, dreams, give prophecies, etc. of the Last Days outside that of the Biblical canon. Unfortunately for such individuals, most extra-Biblical prophecies of the end-times statistically do not come to pass, and many espoused "dreams or visions from God" are not Scripturally sound.

While we do believe that God will pour out His Spirit on His people, we question many of those who claim to have prophetic dreams or visions. When someone's dream or vision does not come to pass as a person predicts, that person may claim to have had another vision in which the Lord "showed them" that predicted events would occur on another date on which nothing happens.

Many get into the pattern of believing that every dream that they have at night is prophetic, which we should highly question. We have serious reservations when dealing with those who claim to have dreams or visions, as many regard their prophecies to be at the level of, or even above the Bible, **which is highly dangerous.**

We as Believers have enough Bible prophecy to concern ourselves with in Scripture itself; we do not need additional "revelation." Most dreams are simply mental digestion of what people are thinking and have nothing to do with prophecy.

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Dualism: Is it not true that the idea of an intermediate afterlife in Heaven or Hell is predicated on dualism? Is it not true that dualism was a philosophical view that originated with the Greeks, and not with Scripture?

In much of today's Messianic community, is it very easy for a leader or teacher to claim that a theological idea—particularly an accepted tenet of mainstream Christianity—is somehow “Hellenistic” or “Greek,” and simply *by saying this* people will reject it. What will often follow on the part of an audience is no critical thinking or analysis, but just accepting a person's biased opinion, which itself was likely intended to monger fear or inflame prejudice. In the case of anyone who believes in a disembodied, intermediate state for human beings between death and the resurrection, it is true that he has to believe in some kind of dualism to posit post-mortem survival of one's consciousness. Whether this is *exactly* what the Ancient Greeks actually believed, though, requires some review and consideration of what various figures from classical history actually thought.

What is the Greek philosophical concept of the “immortality of the soul” that is so criticized by opponents of dualism? Do keep in mind that ancient philosophical groups like the Epicureans (cf. Acts 17:18) did not believe in any kind of an afterlife, much less a resurrection (just like the Jewish Sadducees). No different than various atheists or agnostics today who believe that death is the total end of a person's existence, so were there many Greeks and Romans in the First Century world of the Apostles who believed the same. **To say that all Greeks believed in a disembodied afterlife would be historically inaccurate.**^a But among those who did believe in a disembodied afterlife, what was specifically adhered to?

There is actually a rather huge difference between Believers today who affirm a *temporary* disembodied state for people between death and the resurrection—and Platonic dualism, as taught by the Hellenistic philosopher Plato, successor of Socrates. In a review of ancient classical sources, both prior to and following the time of Yeshua and the Apostles, it is easy to detect how Platonic dualism advocated that the soul of a person was trapped inside the prison of the body. Death meant an escape from such a prison. N.T. Wright views the following quotations below as being “Classic statements” on how in classical philosophy “the immortal soul is set free from the prison-house of the physical body.”^b

“But, I suppose, if at the time of its release the soul is tainted and impure, because it has always associated with the body and cared for it and loved it, and has been so beguiled by the body and its passions and pleasures that nothing seems real to it but those physical things which can be touched and seen and eaten and drunk and used for sexual enjoyment, making it accustomed to hate and fear and avoid what is invisible and obscure to our eyes, but intelligible and comprehensible by philosophy—if the soul is in this state, do you think that it will be released just by itself, uncontaminated?” (Plato *Phaedo* 81b).^c

“Now the earthly likeness of justice and self-discipline and all the other forms which are precious to souls keep no luster, and there are few who by the use of their feeble faculties and with great difficulty can recognize in the counterfeits the family likeness of the originals. But beauty was once ours to see in all its brightness, when in the company of the blessed we followed Zeus as others followed some other of the Olympians, to enjoy the beautiful vision and to be initiated into that mystery which brings, we may say with reverence, supreme felicity. Whole were we celebrated into that festival, unspotted by all the evils which awaited us in time to come, and whole and unspotted and changeless and serene were the objects revealed to us in the light of that mystic vision. Pure was the light and pure were we from the pollution of the walking sepulchre we call a body, to which we are bound like an oyster to its shell” (Plato *Phaedrus* 250c).^d

^a Consult Ben Witherington III, “A Closer Look: The Fate of the Dead,” in *1&2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp 126-130 for a summary of various Greek and Roman views on the afterlife. Notably, only the heroes of the Hellenistic mythos really had a chance of going to be with the gods, whereas most of the deceased went to a rather gloomy existence in the netherworld of Hades.

^b N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 48.

^c Plato: *The Last Days of Socrates*, trans., Hugh Tredennick and Harold Tarrant (London: Penguin Books, 1993),

140.

^d Plato: *Phaedrus*, trans., Walter Hamilton (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1995), pp 35-36.

“For some say that the body is the grave (sema) of the soul which may be thought to be buried in our present life; or again the index of the soul, because the soul gives indications to (semainei) the body; probably the Orphic poets were the inventors of the name, and they were under the impression that the soul is suffering the punishment of sin, and that the body is an enclosure or prison in which the soul is incarcerated, kept safe (soma, sozetai), as the name soma implies, until the penalty is paid” (Plato *Cratylus* 400c).^e

“Never value anything as profitable that compels you to break your promise, to lose your self-respect, to hate any man, to suspect, to curse, to act the hypocrite, to desire anything that needs walls and curtains: for he who has preferred to everything else his own intelligence and daimon and the worship of its excellence, acts no tragic part, does not groan, will not need either solitude or much company; and, what is chief of all, he will live without either pursuing or flying from death; but whether for a longer or shorter time he shall have the soul enclosed in the body, he cares not at all: for even if he must depart immediately, he will go as readily as if he were going to do anything else that can be done with descency and order; taking care of this only all through life, that his thoughts abide with the concerns of an intelligent animal and a member of a civil community” (Marcus Aurelius *Meditations* 3.7).^f

It is most doubtful that any Messianic Believer who has been told to regard all forms of dualism as something “Greek” and “evil,” has ever really seen a series of relevant quotes from ancient sources. Platonic dualism is something that clearly goes against the Biblical truth of God’s physical Creation being good (Genesis 1:31), which most especially includes how His people are to enjoy eating good food, drinking wine and spirits, a husband and wife taking pleasure in sexual intercourse, and being in awe of the flora and fauna. Platonic dualism leaves open the definite possibility of reincarnation of souls into other bodies after death,^g although the Biblical message is that human life begins in the womb (Psalm 139:13)—with the ultimate end for a Believer’s redemption being a permanently embodied condition at the Second Coming (i.e., Philippians 3:21-22; 1 John 3:2).

Some kind of dualism is required for us to make proper sense out of Biblical passages where deceased persons are depicted in some kind of disembodied, post-mortem, conscious and active condition (i.e., Isaiah 14:9-10; Luke 16:23-31; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Revelation 6:9). The dualism presented to us in the Bible of disembodied activity, largely in Heaven, **need not at all** imply a degradation of the physical body or of the great beauties of Planet Earth—both of which God has made as a testament to His power. The body is by no means a prison in which the soul is trapped as a kind of prison, especially if the ultimate aim of salvation is to see its redemption (Romans 8:23).

Any advocates of Platonic dualism among the Believers in the First Century, would be easily refuted by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:1-4, where he asserts that he would prefer to be further clothed/clothed upon—something to take place at the Second Coming—rather than die and be found naked or bodiless. The more likely condition for most Believers, though, has been the nakedness brought on by death, although he is clear to state that such a condition will mean being present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). Yet, no reader of Paul’s letters or the Bible should ever assume that a disembodied condition is permanent. In his commentary on 2 Corinthians (*NIGTC*), Murray J. Harris properly details,

“Paul may be repudiating the view of the hereafter held by the precursors of Gnosticism at Corinth (1 Cor. 15:12), who appear to have taught, as a corollary of baptismal resurrection, that the Christian hope consisted primarily of emancipation from corporeal defilement. Similarly, in v. 3 may be Paul’s rebuttal of the fallacious deduction made by these Corinthian ‘proto-gnostics’ that

^e Plato: *Cratylus*, trans., Benjamin Jowett (Quiet Vision Publishing, 2004), pp 33-34.

^f Marcus Aurelius: *Meditations*, ed. William Kaufman (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), 16.

^g Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*, 141.

the expression ἐνδύσασθαι ἀθανασίαν [*endusasthai athanasian*] ('to put on immortality') used in 1 Cor. 15:53-54 implied that the believer's final destiny was disembodied immortality.^h

Harris goes on to further detail how Paul does affirm a disembodied condition for the redeemed in the Messiah's presence, although this is only temporary, until the resurrection. His comments are clear that even though Paul held to some dualistic presuppositions, they would be a far cry from the common Platonic views:

“Although Paul did not share the Orphic sentiment σῶμα σῆμα [*sōma sēma*] ('the body is a tomb') and although he never envisioned the Christian *summum bonum* as emancipation from corporeality, apparently he could conceive of temporary disembodiment (cf. 12:2-3) as the lot of believers who die before the second advent...Paul must have believed in the...safekeeping of believers as, in a bodiless state, they await the resurrection: they are in active communion with Christ in his immediate presence (v. 8b).ⁱ

Any kind of dualism seen or implied in the Scriptures, affirming a temporary separation of a person's consciousness from the body until the resurrection, runs into significant conflict with Platonic dualism. For the most part, the Hellenistic dualism seen in the philosophers advocated *permanent disembodiment*. Contrary to this, the dualism present in the Bible advocates *temporary disembodiment* to be followed by the total integration of the person in the resurrection. John W. Cooper, author of the book *Body, Soul, & Life Everlasting*, has helped to label how the Bible advocates **holistic dualism**. He states that “the Hebrew view of human nature strongly emphasizes living a full and integrated existence before God in this world, but that it unquestionably also includes the belief in continued existence after biological death.”^j Holistic dualism allows for a disembodied afterlife, but holds resurrection as the ultimate goal for all people. Holistic dualism totally eschews any perspective where the human body is to somehow be treated as a prison, or Planet Earth as being something less-than-good as created by God.

It is unfortunate that there are various Messianic teachers who operate out of so much of a spirit of malice and hatred toward either evangelical Christianity and/or anything that they perceive as being “Greek,” that in the case of dualism they often make statements in a vacuum, with no references or documentation offered.

It is very true and most unfortunate, that many popular pastors speak of salvation *only* in terms of “going to Heaven when you die,” and fail to speak of the subsequent resurrection and Messianic reign coming to Earth. It is hard to deny that many of today's Christians (and even some Messianics) envision a post-mortem scene quantitatively indifferent from Platonism. Going to be with the Lord in Heaven upon time of death is, incorrectly, thought to be the ultimate destination—rather than returning with Him to the Earth to be resurrected as the Second Coming (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:14). This does need to be significantly corrected with more of an emphasis on the future reality of the resurrection and the world to come. Fair-minded voices need to come forward where the errors of Platonic dualism and endless disembodiment can be replaced, with a correct view of holistic dualism and temporary disembodiment to be attended by the resurrection.

While there are various Believers who need to be corrected from some dualistic errors of Plato, let us not overlook the monistic errors of the psychopannychist, who believes that there is complete unconsciousness between death and the resurrection. This may be far more serious, because in treating the human person as *only* being a collection of bones, tissue, and blood—the psychopannychist is likely to have been influenced by the materialism of Darwinian evolution—which is largely not concerned at regarding human beings as possessing any component or connection from a Divine Creator and another dimension.

^h Murray J. Harris, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 389.

ⁱ *Ibid.*, 402.

^j John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 40.

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