

Each year we celebrate the anniversary of the pivotal moment in our Creator's journey through the ages with us, His creation. Y'shua sacrificed Himself for me. What does this mean for a Christian disciple? Though the Almighty's only-begotten Son and worthy of adoration and worship as a king, He made Himself nothing (Phil 2:5-8). Though sovereign, He chose to liberate me from the rule of darkness and rebellion (John 10:17-18), while i was still His enemy (Rom 5:6-8).

If i want to realise this victory for my life, i need to deny myself, take my cross daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Saul/Paul confirms that if i want to attain resurrection, i have to confirm to Y'shua's suffering and death – Phil 3:10-11. Now what exactly does this mean for a 21<sup>st</sup> century child of an industrialised (or post-industrial) country? On trial the wheat separates from the chaff. We hear reports from persecuted Christians who refuse to deny their faith or bow to Allah or Mohammed, and suffer death in fellowship with Christ. I have never fought against sin to the point of shedding blood (Heb 12:4). I cannot say whether i would stand, i can only hope that the necessary strength would be conferred on me when it comes to that moment (1 Cor 10:13). Meanwhile, my struggles are keeping focussed on my purpose during long hours at work and commuting, keeping unpolluted by the world (James 1:27), breaking sinful habits, giving liberally to those in need, and praying for direction and guidance by the Holy Spirit.

From the glimpses i have seen so far, i can tell that discipleship will not remain as comparatively cushy and distracted. We should not fool ourselves and be ready for some turbulent events, as dramatic and rapid (once they commence) as the world has not seen (Mt 24, Revelation/Unveiling). Two important, interlinked elements for me in preparation are: 1. understanding the Jewish cultural / theological context of Rabbi Y'shua Ha'Mashiach, and 2. reading and trying to make sense of end-times prophecy.

To begin with one key concept, here is a short summary of what i understand of the Hebrew concept of the afterlife –

### Death is unconscious.

Adam "man" is made of Adamah "ground/earth" and receives his Spirit blown in by the Lord through the nostrils (Gen 2:7). To have consciousness, i.e. self-awareness and perception of time, man needs both a physical body and the spirit.

On death, the Spirit returns to where It came from, and the body turns back to the dust of the earth (Gen 3:19). Hence Y'shua commanded His Spirit into the Father's hands (Luke 23:46, quoting Psalm 31:6), and Stephanus in turn asks Y'shua to receive his Spirit (Acts 7:59).

All that your hand finds to do, do with your vigor,  
for there is no doing or devising or knowledge  
or wisdom in the unseen where you are going.

Ecclesiastes 9:10

For in death there is no remembrance of You;  
in the unseen, who shall acclaim You?

Psalm 6:5

The dead cannot praise Yah, nor all  
those descending into stillness.

Psalm 115:17

The word the **concordant version** translates with "unseen" is Sheol, a Hebrew concept for an unconscious state. The direct Greek equivalent is "Hades".

Saul/Paul makes this very specifically clear in his first letter to the Thessalonians, explaining that those who have fallen asleep in Christ will be resurrected on Christ's return.

The heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 have died in hope of a better resurrection (not hope of a better conscious afterlife).

Only Y'shua himself has ascended into "heaven", the Spirit residence of the Almighty, as he directly came from there also (John 3:13).

The patriarchs are resting in Sheol (unconscious) waiting to be resurrected, just like Daniel is told (Dan 12:13) that he will rest and rise again for his lot at the end of the days.

Hebrew does not distinguish between "heaven" as the Spirit's sphere and the "sky" as the earth's atmosphere where the birds fly. The word in both cases is שָׁמַיִם "Shamaim". Nevertheless, there are indications that Enoch or Elijah were not lifted into "heaven" but in fact into the sky. Enoch is among the Hebrew 11 heroes of faith, of whom is said that they all *died* in faith (11:13) – the logical explanation is that he was rescued from a perilous situation by being lifted into the air supernaturally, so not to taste death right there and then. And Elijah writes to king Jehoram in 2. Chronicles 21, after his ascension into "the heavens" in a tempest, probably not from Spirit "heaven"!