

Title of the podcast series: Life, death, and Afterlife in Israel's Society

Title of the podcast episode: "Greek Orthodox Christianity in Israel-  
Their Beliefs and Practices in Life, Death, and Afterlife"

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Welcome, everyone; thanks for tuning in to hear about today's subject.

This episode focuses on Greek Orthodox Christianity in Israel.

While not a main religion like Judaism, it is another known religion in Israeli society and is part of the Christian religion. It has an interesting history and is a fun topic to examine.

This episode of the podcast series was produced in the fall 2023, as part of the First Year Seminar titled: Life, death, and afterlife in Israel's society, with Prof. Zeedan at the University of Kansas.

I'm your host Natalee Thompson.

I'd like to introduce myself as someone who likes to learn. Whether it's about people's experiences, diverse cultures, or a range of topics, I find joy in expanding my knowledge and understanding. I'm always eager to explore and absorb new information, and I believe that learning is a journey that enriches our lives in countless ways.

\*music transition\*

This episode is about the beliefs and practices regarding life, death, and the afterlife among the Greek Orthodox Christians in Israel.

This is important since it helps us understand the multicultural society in Israel. The information here is based on a survey of the existing literature about the topic. I will be posting my sources online. More details at the end of this episode.

In our episode today, we will talk about three major items: 1) the Life of the Greek Orthodox Christian in Israel; 2) the Practices and beliefs regarding death among the Greek Orthodox Christian in Israel;; and then 3) the beliefs regarding the afterlife among the Greek Orthodox Christian in Israel.

Did you know that these specific Christians do not believe in purgatory or a space between heaven and hell? This will be discussed more when talking about their afterlife beliefs.

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The life of the Greek Orthodox Christians in Israel is a thriving one despite being a lesser-known religion, but they are very prominent in the history of Jerusalem.

They are Christians, which means they are monotheistic and believe in the bible.

These beliefs are rooted in the teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Church and are based on a combination of scriptures, tradition, and theological reflection.

They originally came from Greece, where about 90% of people in Greece are Orthodox.

The religion began to spread to Europe in the 9th century, and now they're mainly based in Europe and the Middle East.

This came to be due to The Great Schism of 1040, which split the main faction of Christianity into two divisions, the Roman Catholic vs. Eastern Orthodox. This was a pivotal moment that de-unified the church and began the separation of churches, causing religions to spread and divide.

Around 30% of Christians in Israel are followers of the Greek Orthodox church, which has jurisdiction over Israel and Palestine.

The main leader of this religion in Israel right now is the Patriarch Theophilos III, who is the Head of the Patriarchate.

This religion in Israel started with its formation back on the day of the Pentecost. It states that the church's first bishop was a man named James, the Brother of the Lord.

After many battles between Romans, it faded away but was rediscovered by the church in the 4th century. In the 14th century, Franciscans penetrated the shrines, and in 1453, Constantinople and Byzantium fell. A Treaty of the shrines was signed, and things started to look up again.

The second half of the 19th century consists of purchasing most of its land from the Ottoman Empire and then, after Israel's independence, leasing its land to the Israeli government and entering itself into their society.

Greek Orthodox Christians believe that their God is the creator of all life and that human life is a special and sacred creation. They believe that humanity was created in God's image and likeness.

According to Orthodox Christian teaching, life's purpose is to seek union with God through faith, worship, prayer, and the practice of virtues. It involves living a life of love, compassion, and holiness.

They also believe in the importance of free will. They emphasize individuals' responsibility to make choices according to their God's will.

In the church, members study the scripture in its original language, and some speak Koine Greek.

Usually, women members wear dresses or skirts, and male members wear dress pants or suits. No shorts, short skirts, or revealing clothing are allowed within the church. Some women have the pious tradition of covering their heads, and no hats are allowed when entering.

In all traditional Greek Orthodox fasting periods, meat, dairy products and fish (except shellfish) are not eaten. Vegetables, cereals, legumes like chickpeas and lentils, as well as fruits, are allowed all year. They live on a mainly Mediterranean diet.

\*music transition\*

Now, onto item number two. Death practices. Greek orthodox Christian members have distinct death practices/rituals compared to other religions in Israel that are deeply rooted in their traditions/beliefs. Oftentimes, when a member is near death, a priest will come in and anoint them. Called the Sacrament of Anointing the Sick, the patient is anointed with special oil blessed by the bishop.

If the patient wants to, they can make a final confession and receive Holy Communion. This is a way they feel can prepare their souls for the afterlife.

Usually, it is customary for family and friends to gather and pray for the members. They often read from Psalms or other religious texts to comfort and support the dying member.

After the patient has passed, the body is washed, anointed with oil, cleaned, and dressed to be prepared for the funeral. The service is very significant. Typically, an

open casket, the service usually includes prayers, readings from the Gospel, and/or hymns.

The body is usually buried rather than cremated, and the sprinkling of earth on the casket typically ensues after being placed in the ground. Afterward, there is a 40-day and 1-year memorial that is extremely important in their culture; it brings family and friends together to celebrate the departed

\*music transition\*

Finally, we've reached the final part of Greek Orthodox culture: their afterlife beliefs. Greek Orthodox Christians believe in the immortality of the soul. They believe that the soul continues to exist after death, and our fate depends on our relationship with God and our actions during life.

However, they do not believe in purgatory. They believe in a process of purification for the soul after death, but it is not a separate place or state. Instead, it is seen as a continuation of our soul's journey towards union with God.

Like most Christians, the Greek Orthodox religion includes the belief in both heaven and hell. Heaven is the place of God, where righteous or faithful souls will forever experience happiness with Him. Hell is a place of separation from God, where souls experience eternal separation and suffering because of sinful choices.

Individual interpretations and practices may vary within the broader Orthodox Christian tradition, so this is just a general summary of the beliefs.

\*Music transition\*

This concludes the end of the podcast. We have explored just a brief look into Greek Orthodox Christianity's life, death, and afterlife. While like other Christian religions, they have their own practices and ways of doing things. I hope you enjoyed listening to this and learned a few things.

I will be posting my sources for this episode online; look at this online page where you are listening to the episode.

Thank you to everyone listening in; it was a pleasure to share with you what I have learned. I hope it was at least a little entertaining and encourages you to learn about the other religions in Israeli society. That's it for me, goodbye!

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