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## **The Meaning of κοιμάω in the Letter to the Corinthians of St. Clement of Rome and in the Gospels**

### **Znaczenie κοιμάω w Liście do Koryntian św. Klemensa Rzymskiego i w Ewangeliach**

**Abstract.** This research examines the use of the word ‘κοιμάω’ in the Letter to the Corinthians of St. Clement of Rome and in the Gospels. In 1 Clement, the term ‘κοιμάω’ is primarily used to depict the death of the righteous, especially in relation to martyrs. It signifies a tranquil and restful condition, standing in stark contrast to the chaos of earthly existence. This verb instills a sense of hope and continuity in faith, presenting death not as a conclusion but rather as a brief repose in anticipation of resurrection. In contrast, the Gospels use the term ‘κοιμάω’ both in literal and figurative meanings: physical slumber and spiritual unpreparedness. This paper examines the broader theological significance of ‘κοιμάω’ by comparing its two applications as a metaphor for death, sleep, and resurrection within early Christian thought. It emphasizes the complex role this term played in the development of early Christian eschatology and the portrayal of Jesus’ mission. The analysis reveals that the verb ‘κοιμάω’ functions as a profound theological and literary instrument that connects the temporal with the eternal, as well as life with death, prompting contemplation of the human experience and the hope for divine salvation.

**Streszczenie.** W niniejszym badaniu analizuje się użycie słowa „κοιμάω” w Liście do Koryntian św. Klemensa Rzymskiego i w Ewangeliach. W 1 Liście Klemensa termin „κοιμάω” jest używany przede wszystkim do przedstawienia śmierci sprawiedliwych, zwłaszcza w odniesieniu do męczenników. Oznacza on spokojny i wypoczynkowo-relaksacyjny stan, stanowiący ostry kontrast z chaosem ziemskiej egzystencji. Ten czasownik wzbudza poczucie nadziei i ciągłości wiary, przedstawiając śmierć nie jako zakończenie, ale raczej jako krótki odpoczynek w oczekiwaniu na zmartwychwstanie. Natomiast Ewangelie używają terminu „κοιμάω” zarówno w znaczeniu dosłownym, jak i przenośnym: fizyczny sen i duchowe nieprzygotowanie. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje szersze znaczenie teologiczne „κοιμάω” poprzez porównanie jego dwóch zastosowań jako metafory śmierci, snu i zmartwychwstania w myśli wczesnochrześcijańskiej.

Podkreśla złożoną rolę, jaką ten termin odegrał w rozwoju wczesnochrześcijańskiej eschatologii i przedstawieniu misji Jezusa. Analiza ujawnia, że czasownik „κοιμάω” funkcjonuje jako głęboki teologiczny i literacki instrument, który łączy doczesność z wiecznością, a także życie ze śmiercią, skłaniając do kontemplacji ludzkiego doświadczenia i nadziei na boskie zbawienie.

**Keywords:** Clement of Rome, κοιμάω, Gospels, Eschatology, Ecclesiology.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Klemens Rzymski, κοιμάω, Ewangelie, eschatologia, eklezjologia.

## 1. Clement of Rome and the Letter of 1 Clement

St. Clement, who flourished around 96 AD and is commonly referred to as Clement of Rome, served as the bishop of Rome. He is widely regarded as the third successor to St. Peter, following Linus and Cletus.<sup>1</sup> Clement of Rome existed during an era characterized by significant internal strife within Christian communities, as well as external threats from Roman persecution. Clemens saga is categorized as a narrative detailing the life of a devout individual who was martyred for his beliefs. Saint Clement met his demise by drowning, having been cast overboard from a vessel with an anchor secured around his neck. The biographies of saints typically adhere to a structured format that encompasses specific components. In the case of a saint who has been martyred for their faith, the narrative is generally segmented into three distinct sections: the saint's life, the account of martyrdom, and the posthumous influence of the saint.<sup>2</sup> Clement's martyrdom is infused with a sense of hope, particularly through his use of the term 'κοιμάω' which reflects his theological views on death and resurrection. For Clement, this notion of "sleep" signifies not the end of life but a temporary state that precedes a future awakening. This perspective aligns with the early Christian understanding of death as a kind of "sleep," from which individuals will be awakened at the resurrection, a belief that finds its roots in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles.<sup>3</sup> The association of sleep with his martyrdom conveys a sense of peace and a hopeful promise for what lies ahead as they navigated both internal conflicts and the external pressures of Roman persecution.

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<sup>1</sup> Carron 2005, vii–viii; Hunter et al. 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Carron 2005, vii.

<sup>3</sup> Carron 2005, vii.

1 Clement was written in Rome and aimed at the Church in Corinth, likely between 95 and 97 CE. This letter addresses the Corinthian church, functioning as both a pastoral encouragement and a theological discussion, focusing on matters of church unity, leadership, and discipline.<sup>4</sup> In this framework, Clement draws on various biblical images and ideas to convey Christian teachings, including themes of death and resurrection. A notable term he uses is the Greek verb ‘κοιμάω’ (koímaō), which translates to “to sleep” and appears frequently in both the New Testament and Clement. This verb offers deep theological and pastoral reflections on the nature of death and the promise of resurrection, which are vital components of early Christian faith. Clement’s employment of the term ‘κοιμάω’ is intricately linked to his theological views on death and resurrection. In his letter, he discusses the martyrs and the righteous who are said to “sleep” in death, patiently awaiting resurrection. For Clement, this “sleep” is not an indication of death’s finality but rather a temporary phase leading to a future awakening. This perspective aligns with the early Christian belief that death is akin to a “sleep” from which individuals will be roused at the resurrection, a concept rooted in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles. The connection between sleep and death in 1 Clement evokes a sense of tranquility and a promise of hope for the future, which would have deeply resonated with the Corinthian community facing both internal strife and the external challenges of Roman persecution.

## 2. ‘κοιμάω’ in 1 Clement <sup>5</sup>

The first occurrence of the Greek verb ‘κοιμάω’ appears in 1 Clement 24:3 which indicates that day and night declare to us a resurrection. The night sinks to sleep, and the day arises; the day again departs, and the night comes on (Holmes’ translation). Theophilus of Antioch, in *Autol.* I 13, states that as the day transitions into night, it succumbs to an eternal shroud of darkness. The dignity of the world is diminished, and all matter is enveloped in a veil of blackness. There exists a pervasive silence, marked by a sense of astonishment. In this state, justice and tranquility pervade all corners of existence. The absence of light is lamented,

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<sup>4</sup> Herron 2010, 1–2.

<sup>5</sup> The metaphor of sleep appears in 1 Clement 24:3; 26:2; 44:2. This concept also appears widely in early Christian writings such as Ignatius to the Romans 4:2; Hermas Vision 3 5:1; Hermas Mandate 4 4:4; Hermas Similitude 9 11:3, 6; 16:3, 5, 7.

yet, through reverence and offerings, the sun – unchanged and integral to the cosmos – reemerges within the world. Amidst the multitude, his demise, the encroaching night, interrupts his internment. Darkness, as the inheritor of his essence, persists until the night itself is rejuvenated alongside its celestial platform. The stars' rays, once extinguished, are reignited by the dawn, which had previously been deprived of their brilliance. The temporal separation that had once obscured their presence is now reconciled, and the moon's luminescence, dulled by the passage of time, is restored anew.<sup>6</sup> The passage in 1 Clement 24:3 illustrates the use of the Greek verb 'κοιμάω' within the framework of the solar system. Clement describes how all entities within our solar system will metaphorically fall into a state of sleep, only to eventually awaken and proclaim a resurrection.

The second instance of the Greek verb 'κοιμάω' is found in 1 Clement 26:2 which states for the Scripture saith in a certain place, Thou shalt raise me up, and I shall confess unto Thee; and again, I laid me down, and slept; I awaked, because Thou art with me" (Holmes' translation). The scriptural evidence serves as the final component in the chain of proof: each instance within the series of resurrections carries a significant weight. The origin of the initial citation remains uncertain, although it appears reminiscent of Psalm 16:9–10, which states, "and my flesh was resurrected, and by his will I confess to him; see also Psalm 30:3, 'O Lord, you brought up my soul from the grave; you restored me to life from among those gone down to the pit.'" The second citation appears to be a synthesis of Psalm 13:3 and Psalm 23:4, conveying the sentiment, "I fell asleep, and I slept; he said that he was a master, understand me, and I will fear no evil, for you are with me."<sup>7</sup> This verse signifies that the faithful individual will not encounter death, as God will resurrect him. The believer will enter a state of sleep and subsequently awaken, assured by the presence of God.

The third occurrence of the Greek verb 'κοιμάω' appears in 1 Clement 44:2, which articulates: for this reason, therefore, because they had obtained a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed those ministers already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry (Holmes' translation). While 1 Clement 26:2 speaks of an individual, 1 Clement 44:2 refers to a community

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<sup>6</sup> Knopf 2024, 178. <https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=31579543>.

<sup>7</sup> Knopf 2024, 183–184.

of ministers. These ministers will pass away. Their death is pictured as sleeping. The other approved men will continue their ministry. Again, Clement always refers sleep to the actual death for believers. In 1 Clement 26:2, the focus is on an individual, whereas 1 Clement 44:2 addresses a collective group of ministers. The text indicates that these ministers will eventually die, with their death metaphorically described as a state of sleep. Meanwhile, the other recognized individuals will persist in their ministerial duties. Notably, Clement consistently associates the concept of sleep with the actual death experienced by believers.

In 1 Clement, the term 'κοιμάω' is used in relation to death and resurrection. Clement often refers to the martyrs and the righteous as those who "sleep" in death, patiently awaiting the resurrection that has been promised. In this context, Clement employs the idea of "sleep" to describe the physical death of Christians, especially martyrs, highlighting that death is not the end but rather a temporary phase leading to resurrection. The term emphasizes the Christian belief that, just as one awakens from sleep, the dead will also rise again during the resurrection at the end of time. For Clement, death is not a final defeat but a peaceful pause before the eternal life that Christ has promised.

### 3. 'κοιμάω' in the Gospels<sup>8</sup>

The Greek verb 'κοιμάω' appears five times in the Gospels: Matthew 27:52, 28:13; Luke 22:45; John 11:11 and John 11:12. Matthew 27:52 indicates that the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had died were resurrected (NASB). This verse is situated within a narrative that describes remarkable events occurring immediately after Jesus surrendered his spirit, including the tearing of the temple veil from top to bottom, a seismic disturbance, the splitting of rocks, the opening of tombs, and the resurrection of many deceased saints. Various translations, including the KJV, NAS, and NET Bible, affirm that these saints were indeed raised. Meyers and Strange note that popular folk beliefs revered the tombs of the saints, stemming from the conviction in the resurrection of the righteous.<sup>9</sup> The resurrection of these saints serves as a precursor to the resurrection of Jesus, who is regarded as the holiest of all saints.<sup>10</sup> The resurrection of de-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Acts 7:60; 12:6; 13:36; 1 Cor 7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thes 4:13–15; 2 Pet 3:4.

<sup>9</sup> Meyers and Strange 1981, 162. Cf. Meyer and Meyer 1884, 185.

<sup>10</sup> Keener 1999, 898.

ceased individuals described in this account is unique among the various gospel narratives and raises numerous questions for those with a historical perspective. Matthew does not provide any clarification regarding the interval between the opening of the tombs and the subsequent appearance of the resurrected individuals in Jerusalem two days later, nor does he explain their fate thereafter. This absence of detail invites speculation about what a recording device might have captured and why the emergence of “many” notable deceased figures to “many” witnesses left no discernible record in historical documentation. Like many of Jesus’ miracles that defy scientific explanation, Matthew appears unconcerned with addressing our innate curiosity or empirical doubts. Instead, he narrates this event for its symbolic implications.<sup>11</sup> The “holy people who had died” are likely to be interpreted as devout Jews; however, it remains unclear whether Matthew refers to individuals from his contemporary period or to well-known figures from the Old Testament era interred in the vicinity of Jerusalem.<sup>12, 13</sup> Several Old Testament passages allude to the resurrection of God’s people in some capacity, with Daniel 12:2 and, arguably, Isaiah 26:19 being the most explicit. The phrasing employed by Matthew particularly evokes Ezekiel 37:13, which states, “when I open your graves and bring you up out of your graves, my people” (note also the earthquake-like imagery in Ezekiel 37:7).<sup>14</sup> In that context, resurrection serves as a metaphor for national restoration rather than a guarantee of personal

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<sup>11</sup> France 2007, 901.

<sup>12</sup> The conventional reference to Jerusalem as “the holy city” is discussed in 4:5. R. E. Brown, in his work *Death*, page 1131, appropriately critiques and rejects the notion that this reference pertains to heaven rather than Jerusalem.

<sup>13</sup> The term “the holy ones,” utilized as a noun, appears exclusively in the Gospel of Matthew. In the New Testament, this term typically designates members of the Christian community; however, such an interpretation is not suitable in this context. The origins of this phrase may be traced back to its usage in Daniel 7:18, 21–22, among other passages, where “holy ones” refers to the faithful people of Israel. Additionally, while the phrase is significantly employed in the Septuagint to refer to angels, this connotation is not applicable here, as the individuals in question are deceased.

<sup>14</sup> The association of Ezekiel 37:1–14 within Jewish theological discourse with the concept of an eschatological resurrection – likely influenced by Zechariah 14:4–5 – is exemplified by a third-century mural located in the synagogue of Dura Europos, as noted by R. E. Brown in his work, *Death*, 1123. For a comprehensive understanding of the Old Testament context, particularly the impact of Ezekiel 37, refer to D. P. Senior’s analysis in *Passion*, 319–22, where the resurrection is characterized as part of “a collection of traditional eschatological indicators of the final day, marking the culmination of God’s redemptive work.”

life after death. Matthew explicitly associates the resurrection of these unnamed individuals with that of Jesus, even though the earthquake that frees them occurs now of Jesus' death. His choice of wording allows for the interpretation that they did not emerge from the opened tombs until after Jesus' resurrection, or, less intuitively, that they did so immediately but the narrative remains situated outside the city until that point. Regardless of the circumstances, there exists a degree of narrative awkwardness; however, this may serve to emphasize the sequence, "after Jesus' resurrection." His resurrection is the initial event, while the subsequent resurrections are a direct result (see 1 Cor 15:20–23; 1 Thess 4:14).<sup>15</sup> To effectively convey this message, Matthew might have more suitably connected this event with the second earthquake that unveils Jesus' empty tomb in 28:2. Nevertheless, his decision to document it here, despite the challenge of delaying their resurrection and/or appearance for two days following the earthquake, indicates that he perceives Jesus' death, in addition to his resurrection, as pivotal to the new life now accessible to God's followers.<sup>16</sup> Refer to John 5:25–29 for the concept of an eschatological resurrection of the dead, which will be judged by the Son of Man. In this passage, it is stated that "those in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life." Jesus indicates in John 5:25 that this eschatological event "is coming and is now." Albright and Mann characterize the scene in Matthew as a "dramatization" of

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<sup>15</sup> The proposal put forth by Wenham 1981, 150–152 to insert a period after "were opened" serves to distinguish the earthquake and its consequences from the resurrection of the saints. This suggestion disrupts Matthew's continuous sequence of paratactic clauses characterized by aorist passive verbs, as discussed by Brown 1994, 1118–1119, 1129. Even if this punctuation is adopted, it still indicates that the tombs were opened at the moment of Jesus' death rather than following his resurrection. Consequently, the disjointed temporal relationship between the opening of the tombs and the subsequent appearance of the resurrected saints persists, unless one aligns with Wenham's assertion that their resurrection occurred independently of the tombs being opened.

<sup>16</sup> Allison (1987) in his work on pages 45–46, interprets Matthew's somewhat clumsy inclusion of the phrase "after his resurrection" as an indication that he is altering a pre-existing tradition rather than creating the scene independently. However, this perspective stands in contrast to Brown's (1994) analysis found in *Death*, pages 1139–40. Furthermore, Davies and Allison, in volume 3, page 634, express a revised suspicion that the phrase "after his resurrection" may represent an early gloss, albeit without supporting manuscript or variant evidence.

the saying found in the Gospel of John.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the death of the saints is often referred to as a state of sleep. Ignatius, *Magn.* 9.2, also states that sleep was a common metaphor for death. It does not inherently suggest the existence of an unconscious transitional state.

The second instance of the Greek verb 'κοιμάω' is found in Matthew 28:13, which states: "and said, you are to say, 'His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep'" (NASB). Scholars Davies and Allison contend that this verse reiterates the accusation and terminology present in Matthew 27:64, which claims that the disciples took Jesus. The audience is aware that the guards were not literally asleep. However, even if they had been, their testimony would be inherently self-damaging: what credibility does a sleeping guard possess? Chrysostom, in his Homilies on Matthew 90.1, captures the essence of the narrative, noting that due to the clarity and obviousness of the truth, they are incapable of fabricating a falsehood.<sup>18</sup> In short, Matthew 28:13 speaks of sleeping in a literal sense.

The third occurrence of the Greek verb 'κοιμάω' appears in Luke 22:45, which articulates: And when He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow. The context of this verse is after the Last Supper, Jesus and his disciples proceed to the Mount of Olives. It is here that Jesus experiences deep anguish in prayer regarding the trials that lie ahead. His genuine humanity and his readiness to submit to divine will are clearly demonstrated when he prays, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." In stark contrast, the frailty of the disciples is highlighted as they succumb to sleep, neglecting Jesus' exhortation to remain vigilant and en-

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<sup>17</sup> A further eschatological aspect in the current context has been articulated by D. C. Allison (*End*, 43–44; see also Davies and Allison, 3:628–29). He interprets the fracturing of the rocks as a reflection of the division of the Mount of Olives, as described in Zechariah 14:4–5, utilizing the same verb found in the Septuagint. However, while Allison demonstrates that certain later Jewish interpretations viewed Zechariah 14:4–5 as referring to a future resurrection (refer to note 44), this interpretation is not the most straightforward reading of the text. The ἄγγελοι who accompany Yahweh in 14:5 are typically regarded as angels rather than resurrected individuals. Additionally, the Mount of Olives is not referenced in the passage under consideration. R. L. Troxel proposes an alternative source for the symbolism, alongside Ezekiel 37, in the eschatological vision presented in 1 Enoch 93:6, particularly when interpreted in conjunction with the concept of the emptying of Sheol in 1 Enoch 51:1–2. Troxel contends that this allusion more appropriately leads to the proclamation of Jesus as the "Son of God" in verse 54.

<sup>18</sup> Davies and Allison 1997, 671. Cf. Allen 1977, 305.

gaged in prayer.<sup>19</sup> Schreiner adds that Jesus instinctively experiences a profound aversion to his fate, pleading with his Father to remove the cup from him, as this cup symbolizes the divine wrath that is to be unleashed upon him. Nevertheless, through the act of prayer, he triumphs over this trial, steadfastly adhering to his father's will. In contrast, the disciples serve as foil; instead of engaging in prayer, they succumb to sleep during this critical moment of testing.<sup>20</sup> Luke, however, refrains from elaborating on the shortcomings of the disciples and does not provide an in-depth account of Jesus' suffering. In contrast, Matthew and Mark include an additional prayer of Jesus and note two separate occasions where the disciples succumb to sleep. For Luke, a singular mention of each is adequate, supplemented by an explanation for the disciples' drowsiness: fatigue stemming from sorrow (v.45). Furthermore, Luke reiterates the command for the disciples to "pray" to avoid "falling into temptation" (v.46).<sup>21</sup>

The fourth and fifth instances of the Greek verb 'κοιμάω' can be found in John 11:11 and John 11:12: This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, that I may awaken him out of sleep." The disciples therefore said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Jesus provides a clear rationale for their return to Judea. The designation of Lazarus as "our friend" (ὁ φίλος ἡμῶν) by Jesus underscores the established bond between Him and the family from Bethany (cf. v. 3), a sentiment that is also shared by the disciples, who regard Lazarus as a friend.<sup>22</sup> John focuses on Lazarus's illness, and Jesus refers to Lazarus as having "fallen asleep," a term that, in the New Testament, often symbolizes death for believers. Jesus communicates to his followers that Lazarus is in a state of sleep, asserting, "I am going there to awaken him." The distinction between the collective "our friend" and the singular "I am going" is significant: Jesus alone embodies the resurrection and the life (v. 25).<sup>23</sup> It is noteworthy that this terminology starkly contrasts with the pervasive fear of death in the ancient world, where it was viewed as an insurmountable adversary. However, the resurrection of Christ transformed

<sup>19</sup> Strauss 2016, 368, <http://rbdigital.oneclickdigital.com>. Cf. Bock 2009, 616. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1524828>.

<sup>20</sup> Schreiner 2019, 83. <https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5969695>.

<sup>21</sup> Liefeld and Pao 2017, 473. <https://www.overdrive.com/search?q=5E549F13-72E0-44AB-A2CD-7F3B42542503>.

<sup>22</sup> Klink 2016, 677.

<sup>23</sup> Carson 1991, 317.

this perception for His followers, rendering death no longer a dreaded enemy, as its sting was removed (1 Cor. 15:55). The Greek verb ‘κοιμάω’ is used to signify literal sleep on four occasions and death on fourteen occasions. It is noteworthy that the term “cemetery,” which refers to a burial site in Christian contexts, is derived from this root and translates to “a place of sleep.” The association of ‘κοιμάω’ with death is not solely a Christian innovation; it appears in the works of secular authors as well. However, this usage is not prevalent among them and is distinctly associated with Christian literature.<sup>24</sup>

Although this transformation was yet to occur, Jesus’ language foreshadows the attitudes of His disciples. He describes Lazarus’s state as sleep and indicates His intention to awaken him. At first glance, the disciples’ inability to grasp the metaphorical meaning of “asleep” is striking, leading many scholars to categorize this as a contrived literary device. However, several considerations must be considered. Firstly, the term used in verse 13 for ‘sleep’ (koimēsis, which appears only here in the New Testament) is also present in Hellenistic literature (cf. LSJ, s.v.; NewDocs 3. § 80). There is no reason to assume that Jesus could not have referred to death as ‘sleep,’ nor that the Evangelist could not have chosen this term. Nonetheless, while the metaphor of sleep as a representation of death is prevalent in Christian theology, it is less frequently encountered (though not entirely absent) in the Old Testament and in Second Temple Judaism. In the Old Testament, it primarily manifests in the phrase “X slept with his fathers” (notably in the books of Kings and Chronicles), implying an irreversible sleep from which one cannot awaken (cf. also Job 14:11–12). In contrast, the idea that death is asleep from which one will eventually awaken (Daniel 12:2) was not widely accepted among the populace. Later Jewish texts document its growing acceptance.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, there exists an independent account of a similar misunderstanding during Jesus’ ministry (Mark 5:39 par. – though the Greek term differs).<sup>26</sup> Thirdly, contemporary readers are aware of the story’s outcome; the disciples, however, lacked this foresight.<sup>27</sup> Fourthly, the messenger had arrived to announce Lazarus’ illness, not his death, which would have influenced the disciples’ mindset towards illness.<sup>28</sup> Lastly, the context indicates that the disciples

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<sup>24</sup> Morris 1995, 542; cf. Klink 2016, 617.

<sup>25</sup> Carson 1991, 317.

<sup>26</sup> Carson 1991, 317.

<sup>27</sup> Carson 1991, 317.

<sup>28</sup> Carson 1991, 317.

were reluctant to return to Judea, and it is plausible that such apprehension could lead to a degree of misunderstanding.<sup>29</sup>

In verse 12, John also reveals that the audiences also misunderstood Jesus. A recurring theme in this Gospel is the tendency of Jesus' audience to misinterpret His statements, often interpreting metaphorical expressions in a literal sense. This misinterpretation frequently paves the way for further instruction from Him (cf. 2:20).<sup>30</sup> John aims for his audience to connect verses 11–12 and 25–26, suggesting that those who are friends of Jesus and who 'fall asleep' will ultimately be awakened by Him, who embodies both resurrection and life. The interpretation of the phrase "he will get better" (v. 12), specifically *sōthēsetai* (literally meaning 'he will be saved'), raises more uncertainty, as it subtly alludes to salvation. This verb is frequently associated with complete health, although the wordplay may be intentional, as seen in Mark 5:34 and 10:52.<sup>31</sup> The phrase "may recover" (11:12) is significant in John's writings, where it typically connotes the concept of "salvation" (3:17; 5:34; 10:9; 12:47). This choice of language may highlight the limitations of their understanding of salvation and the depth of their confusion. Jesus addresses their misinterpretation by speaking "plainly" (11:14; cf. 16:29; see also 7:4), expressing his relief at not being present, as the ensuing sign would serve to strengthen their faith (11:15; cf. 2:11; 11:45). The delay in his arrival would not result in Lazarus's death but would instead amplify the public impact of the miracle.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. 'κοιμάω' in 1 Clement and the Gospels

Clement of Rome and the Gospels both utilize the term 'κοιμάω' to reflect the early Christian perspectives on death, resurrection, and the importance of spiritual alertness. For Clement, 'κοιμάω' underscores the hope of resurrection within the Christian faith. He portrays the martyrs and the righteous as "sleeping" in death, patiently awaiting the glorious awakening that will accompany

<sup>29</sup> Carson 1991, 317.

<sup>30</sup> Morris 1995, 543.

<sup>31</sup> Carson 1991, 317.

<sup>32</sup> The term 'κοιμάω' typically referred to the physical act of sleeping; however, in the context of the LXX, it frequently denoted the metaphorical sleep of death. Keener, *John*, 840–841; cf. Ramsey Michaels 2010, 527.

Christ's return. This notion serves as a source of comfort and motivation for the community, reminding them that death is merely a passage to eternal life rather than a definitive end.

In the Gospels, while 'κοιμάω' can denote actual sleep, it often conveys a deeper spiritual meaning.<sup>33</sup> This phenomenon is evident in the gospel tradition, particularly in the words of Jesus (e.g., Mark 8:15–18) and frequently in the Gospel of John (e.g., 3:4; 6:52). The disciples, misunderstanding Jesus's metaphorical reference to Lazarus's death as sleep, invoke the familiar notion that sleep is restorative (11:12).<sup>34</sup> In the account of Jairus' daughter, it showcases Jesus' authority over death, reinforcing the belief that death is not the final chapter for those who belong to Christ. Similarly, in the Garden of Gethsemane, 'κοιμάω'

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<sup>33</sup> The application of 'κοιμάω' to signify death is also apparent in Jewish tomb inscriptions composed in Greek. The expression in question is one of the most commonly cited, appearing in numerous instances: CIJ 1:8, §3; 1:12, §17; 1:17–19, §§16–20; 1:21, §24; 1:26, §35; 1:28, §37; 1:31, §44; 1:34, §50; 1:37, §55; 1:39, §§62–63; 1:41, §69; 1:56, §81; 1:59, §85; 1:60, §86; 1:62, §88; 1:63, §90; 1:65, §92; 1:66, §93; 1:67, §95; 1:70, §99; 1:71, §100; 1:72, §102; 1:73, §103; 1:74, §105; 1:75, §106; 1:76, §109; 1:78, §111; 1:81, §117; 1:84, §121; 1:90, §129; 1:92, §131; 1:92, §132; 1:95, §136; 1:96, §137; 1:97, §138; 1:102, §144; 1:103, §145; 1:104, §146; 1:105, §147; 1:107, §149; 1:109, §151; 1:110, §152; 1:111, §154; 1:113, §§156–157; 1:114, §159; 1:118–19, §167; 1:121–22, §169; 1:121, §171; 1:124, §172; 1:130, §180; 1:131, §§184–185; 1:135, §192; 1:195, §277; 1:202, §286) and Latin literature (CIJ 1:144–45, §206; 1:149, §210; 1:150, §212; 1:160, §224; 1:162, §228; 1:187–88, §265; 1:338, §458; 1:473, §658; 1:473, §659 (including Hebrew); 1:473, §660. However, certain Latin inscriptions feature this conventional phrase rendered in Greek (CIJ 1:163, §229; 1:166, §222; 1:338, §459; 1:342–43, §464; 1:384, §523), both Jewish (The following references are pertinent to the discussion: 1 Thessalonians 4:13; Acts 7:60; Revelation 14:13; Sirach 30:17; Jubilees 23:1; 36:18; 1 Enoch 89:38; Psalms of Solomon 2:31; Life of Adam and Eve 3:10; 4 Ezra 7:31–32; 2 Baruch 11:4; 21:25; 36:11; Testament of Moses 10:14; Life of Adam and Eve 48:2; Testament of Dan 7:1; Testament of Issachar 7:9; Testament of Zebulun 10:6; Genesis Rabbah 62:2) and Gentile (For instance, Sophocles in *Oedipus at Colonus* (line 1578); Callimachus in his *Epigrams* (lines 11 and 18); Plutarch in his work on *Apollonius* (section 12, *Moralia* 107D); Propertius in *Elegies* (2.28.25); Diogenes Laertius (1.86); and Ps.-Callisthenes in the *Alexander Romance* (3.6). Additionally, refer to studies on disparate cultures (Mbiti, *Religions*, pages 204–5). This is due to their similarity, sleep and death are often depicted as twin brothers in various pagan myths, as noted in works such as Homer's *Iliad* (14.231) and Statius's *Thebaid* (5.197–199). In literary contexts that involve precise revelations or prophecies, it is common for mortals to misinterpret these messages, either by taking them too literally or too figuratively. Cf. Bishop 2017, 107–121, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1474225X.2017.1356193>.

<sup>34</sup> Keener 1999, 840–841.

highlights human vulnerability and the necessity for spiritual preparedness in the face of impending challenges.

The parallel use of 'κοιμάω' for Christians in both Clement's texts and the Gospels illustrates a shared theological message in early Christianity: death is not a conclusive defeat but rather a temporary slumber from which believers will awaken at the resurrection. This idea would have resonated deeply with Clement's audience, who were grappling with internal strife and external threats, as it provided both solace and a call to steadfastness. Likewise, the Gospel writers employed 'κοιμάω' to convey not just the reality of death but also the assurance of eternal life in Christ, encouraging their readers to stay spiritually alert in anticipation of the forthcoming Kingdom.

## Conclusion

The Gospels use the Greek verb 'κοιμάω' to express both literal sleep, as found in Matthew 28:13 and Luke 22:45, and metaphorical sleep, as demonstrated in Matthew 27:52, John 11:11, and John 11:12. In contrast, 1 Clement employs the phrase 'κοιμάω' solely in a figurative context, referring to nighttime (1 Clement 24:3) and the death of believers (1 Clement 26:2 and 44:2). When discussing the death of Christians, the theological and pastoral themes in 1 Clement reflect Clement's own experiences and the challenges faced by the early church. As a key figure in the Christian community in Rome, Clement likely observed the deaths of many faithful believers, possibly including martyrs who endured persecution under the Roman Empire. In such challenging times, the promise of resurrection would have been a vital source of comfort for Clement and his fellow believers. His use of the term 'κοιμάω' in the letter may indicate his pastoral concern for those mourning the loss of loved ones, alongside his theological belief that, despite the pain of death, it is not the final chapter for those who belong to Christ. Clement's understanding of 'κοιμάω' also aligned with the Gospels. Being deeply involved in church leadership, he would have been well-acquainted with the apostolic teachings about the imminent return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead. The term 'κοιμάω' served as a reassuring reminder that those who had passed away in faith would eventually "awaken" to a life beyond death – an idea that would have provided both a theological foundation and a practical source of hope for the Christians in his community.

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