

HEALING HEREAFTER



**Finding Rational and Refreshing Answers
for Why We're Here
and Where We're Headed**

Jason Dykstra, MD

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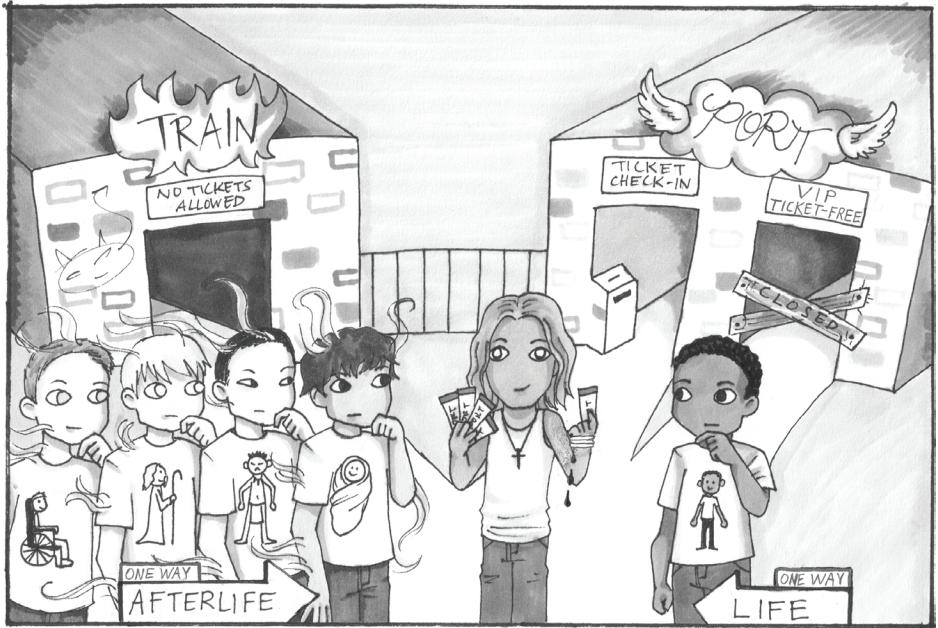
*For everyone who wonders
what the hereafter has in store for us,
and especially for those who want to know why*

*With deep gratitude and love
to my Savior, spouse, and sons,
who all significantly gave of themselves
to make this possible*

Booklet 3

The Ultimate Publicity Stunt

*Questions about those who can't understand
or don't have access to the solution of Jesus while alive
and about the various places and order of events in the biblical afterlife*



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“Hello?” “Hi, this is the (robotic female voice representing the) American Red Cross. Our records indicate that you are eligible for donating blood. Please contact your local Red Cross donation center at 1-800-GIVELIFE to schedule an appointment.” Click. Shocked, I check my calendar, as it couldn’t possibly have been more than two or three weeks since I last donated. Nope. 56 days on the dot. Every time. These people mean business. Not only do they call me the moment my last second of ineligibility has expired; they send me a postcard too, complete with contact info for the nearest blood drive! Shhh, I think they might even be watching us right now . . .

Of course, as a physician who has often seen before my very eyes how life-giving blood donation can be, I’m happy to oblige. I make my way to ye ole fire station and explain that I have refrained from having sex with anyone living in Africa, took Accutane as a teen to conquer my infestation of zits, forgot what the heck Babesiosis was as soon as my second year of medical school was over, and most importantly, never had any brain coverings transplanted, not even once. Then as long as I haven’t stuck myself with a needle or spent five hours on Mexican soil during the previous year (the latter being what disqualified me most recently), they show me to my gurney and begin. From this point on, the only disturbing thing about the process is the way the phlebotomists hungrily stare at the venous pipelines bulging from my forearm, especially when there’s a delicious assortment of snacks and beverages sitting not ten feet from them as a very serviceable alternative. I’m quite certain that their skin shines when the sun hits it just right. Once the

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needle's in though, it's smooth sailing. As the phlebotomists are usually similar in age to me, the music they have playing is always good stuff, and even if they forget I am there and let me completely drain, at least I'd slip into the hereafter to some good vibes. But they don't, and that blood bag fills up fast; after all, my body will do anything to get to unlimited free Oreos and Nutter Butters! After the fifth or sixth package (I wish), I leave with my sticker to place on my calendar on the very day I will be shocked to learn that I'm eligible yet again. Chalk up another pint of blood for the Red Cross.

They've gotten through to me, and chances are good they've gotten through to you as well. You can run, but you can't hide. They know where you are, and they will find a way to reach you! Because they want to give life. Sometimes their publicity initiatives seem monotonously familiar, annoying, and even intrusive, but in the end, the goal is to give life to as many people as possible. And they certainly make an admirable effort!

But it pales in comparison to the ultimate publicity stunt. God himself has an initiative to publicize—the message of Jesus. But unlike the Red Cross, he has the resources to accomplish the goal of giving the greatest quality of life to the greatest number of people possible, limited only by their response. Anyone can run, but no one can hide. He knows where you are, and he will find a way to reach you—and every single other person as well—with this message! Because he wants to give you life . . .

1

So now you're privy to God's master plan and have heard how his solution applies to you. You've been given exposure to the gospel, but what about those who don't have access to the solution of Jesus in a way they are capable of comprehending during physical life (termed "meaningful access" throughout this book)? What about people who are too young or mentally unable to understand the plan even if they do hear it? What about everyone who died before Christ provided a way out? What about all those folks without meaningful access to the gospel since then? Does God reach them with the gospel too, and if so, how? Some argue that these questions are unanswerable mysteries, but that we can trust that God's got it all figured out, so we don't have to. "We so desperately want to answer these questions, but the fact is that God has not revealed what he will or will not do in these cases...the answers here are beyond our human capacity."¹ On the contrary, we will find that God has revealed a great deal about his approach to salvation for these folks, and what he says is quite within our capacity to understand. Many people are content to write off these issues as mysteries, but it is often only because they are not motivated to discover all the options that the Bible offers them or because the constraints of their current beliefs will not allow them to. "We must never avert our eyes from those elements in it (*Christianity*) which seem puzzling or repellent; for it will be precisely the puzzling or the repellent which conceals what we do not yet know and need to know."² We need to find answers to the above questions because they cast doubt on God's trustworthiness, goodness, consistency, and rationality. Therefore, mystery is not an adequate response, and it is not a necessary one either. We have the motivation to discover our biblical options, and we've rejected any constraints except the Bible itself. So let's see what answers are available to us!

In answering questions regarding those without meaningful access to the gospel, we will find that there are two extremes we must avoid. The first is to assume that God automatically rewards people

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with eternity in Heaven without their ever having heard and accepted his solution, the message of Jesus. We'll explore the potential problems with this extreme in Chapter 2 when we talk about those who die very young. The second is to assume that God condemns someone to eternity in Hell without them ever having heard and understood the solution of Jesus. For their purposes in this chapter, we'll observe two reasons this second extreme cannot be true.

We've plainly seen that God and his judgments must be just (Deuteronomy 32:4, 1 Peter 2:23). For God to be partial, he must violate his own nature and disown himself, things he cannot and would never do (2 Timothy 2:13). "God does not show favoritism (Romans 2:11)," and he reaffirms his disdain for partiality well over twenty times in the Bible. "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly" (Leviticus 19:15). No judge who sets one person free but sentences another to death, when both similarly committed murder, would ever be considered impartial or fair in judgment! How could God be just by including the option of Heaven in one person's sentence while only allowing another person the option of Hell, when both are guilty of the same capital offense? He simply cannot if he is to remain the God of the Bible.

Second, why on earth would God go through the limitation, humiliation, and torture of becoming a man destined to die for humanity if he didn't plan on letting most of us know about it anyway? That would be even more bewildering than someone sacrificing everything to labor her whole life finding a cure for heart disease, cancer, stroke, *and* AIDS, only to administer it to a small group of people before taking the formula with her to the grave. God makes sense. This doesn't. God does not want only a minority of lucky individuals to be saved. God "wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth," willing "that everyone who looks to Jesus and believes in him shall have eternal life" (1 Timothy 2:3-4, John 6:40). Obviously, God would not allow this desire to be thwarted by a mere lack of exposure, education, or capability. The ancient Mexican Mayans, the tribal modern Micronesians, the myriad miscarriages, the mentally moribund, and the immobilized

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missionary with a flat tire are hardly insurmountable problems for God. When it comes to who determines whether or not a person is saved, there are only three possibilities: God, the individual himself, or the people responsible for getting the gospel to that individual. We now know and will continue to learn in Booklet 4 that God alone doesn't decide who is saved or not, and he is not willing to let the success or failure of human evangelism to a person decide that either. As is most just, loving, and logical, he allows people to freely make the decision regarding their own salvation. To make this possible, he will fairly get his message out and explain his solution to all before he gets down to judging us. Let's explore how he pulls off this ultimate publicity stunt!

Jesus confirms that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). It is extremely important to note that Jesus' message will reach each person before "the end," the "last day" of judgment prior to our entrance into Hell or Heaven (John 6:40, 12:48), but not necessarily before a person's death. What?!?! You mean there's time between physical death and final judgment to learn and understand the gospel? Of course! For those who couldn't have done so while they were physically alive, how could God allow it to be any other way? "For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit" (1 Peter 4:6). We see that it was always part of God's plan to make sure the gospel was known to those who died long before Jesus' solution was available! "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built" (1 Peter 3:18-20). Jesus doesn't just bust out of the grave, fly off to the current heaven, and wait for all those lucky souls who were born afterwards with the gospel neatly packaged solely for them. Rather, he immediately shares his message with the spirits of those

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who were born and died beforehand, *all* the way back, before Moses, before Abraham, before the Jews, and before the great flood, which is the first biblical story we encounter following that of Adam and Eve's family! We'll explore and validate this postmortem evangelism a lot more throughout this booklet, but for now you only need to consider "a temporary resting place, in between bodily death and bodily resurrection," where God can get his gospel to all human spirits who couldn't get it here.³

And the spirits in 1 Peter 3 were not necessarily the goody-two-shoes of their day (where did that expression come from anyway?), as if Jesus wanted to preach only to the deceased who were most likely to listen. No, he's sharing God's solution to a group including those "who disobeyed" so badly that a flood was sent to reboot the human race! "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled" (Genesis 6:5-6). If there were ever people God would be OK sending to Hell without giving them the gospel, these would be them! But he's not OK with that, is he? Not only is he clearly not excited to send the flood; he makes sure these folks get to hear the message of Jesus, just like everyone else. Paul confirms that this option will be available to such people without meaningful access to the gospel when he states that Jesus "died for us so that, whether we are awake (*alive*) or asleep (*dead*), we may live together with him" (1 Thessalonians 5:10).

Based on this substantial evangelistic effort and based on what we know about God's purpose for humanity, would he not also reveal the gospel to those living *after* Jesus who weren't able to access and understand God's solution for them? After all, the deceased who are hearing the gospel in 1 Peter 4:6, those who lived before Jesus' death and resurrection, *did* represent *all* the folks who had no access to the gospel up to that time. Of course he would reach such people, then and now! And since he's God, he can do this in all kinds of different ways. He sends an angel to tell a Roman centurion how to meaningfully access Jesus' message (Acts 10) and uses a vision to bring

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the gospel to the people of Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). Even nowadays you might have heard accounts from missionaries—as I have also—who are in remote places where Christians have never before been to share God’s solution with the indigenous people, and yet the missionaries find that these people do know at least some aspects of God’s plan and Jesus’ message, often in significant detail! Paul is right to long for the salvation of these folks, asking, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” But he stops short of saying that it is humans who do all the preaching, doesn’t he? Obviously, the news is so good and so vital that God decides to do a little preaching himself. Now that would be a sermon I would want to hear! “This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven” (Colossians 1:23). Whether alive or dead, exposed or isolated, in utero or insane, and whether by humans or by other means, God will be sure Jesus’ message gets to you before your eternal fate is decided.

Keep in mind too that it is a human spirit—who a person really and eternally is—that is being evangelized, not a body. God is not going to be explaining to a deceased toddler why Jesus is the way, nor will he be delineating his plan of salvation to a schizophrenic. He’ll be communicating to and judging not their limited bodies, but their spirits, which would be just as mature and capable as our own for the reasons described in Booklet 2. No one knows whether or not a person’s spirit can understand a purely physical presentation of the gospel—such as hearing it from a friend or seeing it written on a page—without a mature or functional enough brain to relay the involved physical stimuli to that spirit. But we do know that whatever physical response these individuals have to the gospel is not necessarily the same response their spirits would have, if unhindered by bodily limitations. In other words, just because a person in a coma or with dementia doesn’t believe the gospel when it’s physically presented to her (duh!) doesn’t mean her spirit wouldn’t if the physical barriers were removed. The developmental or pathologic limitations these individuals’ bodies pose on them are only as temporary

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as their bodies are, and no matter what, they will fully comprehend the choice that they've been given before they're judged. God is just and wants them to be saved. He'll give them all the information and understanding they need to make an informed, free-willed decision.

For some of you this may be unsettling, as you have plenty of meaningful access to the gospel, are quite capable of understanding it, but have chosen not to accept it and close the loop on God's purpose for you. Biblically, you will not have another chance to do so between your death and judgment. In the Bible this postmortem opportunity is only offered to those without meaningful access on earth to Jesus' message. Everyone else has already been justly exposed to the gospel and encouraged to accept it. For many of you this will be very comforting, as you may have known people who, as far you know, were never able to hear or understand God's solution for them. Be encouraged, God is just! You've gotten a chance to understand the gospel; so will they. For others this may be a bit surprising, as you had always believed that children or the mentally disabled or the natives from whatever distant land you can think of—Africa seems to be the most popular for some reason—were automatically saved because they had no way to understand the gospel. This belief seems to be most commonly applied to children, probably because people tend to have a greater emotional reaction to the proposition of children going to Hell, rather than the mentally ill or geographically remote. Obviously, an impartial God would equally apply such automatic salvation to all three groups if there were any way for him to impartially apply it at all. There isn't, "for God does not show favoritism" (Romans 2:11). He cannot offer automatic salvation to any or all of these groups because it isn't impartial to offer automatic salvation to anyone in the first place (Deuteronomy 10:17).

2

The belief that all children go to Heaven largely arises from what was probably the same occurrence in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

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Children surround Jesus, and he tells his disciples, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God *like* a little child will never enter it” (Luke 18:16-17). Aside from implying that there will be people who will never enter God’s kingdom, Jesus is certainly not saying that all children go to Heaven. The two requirements for Heaven he gives here are receiving the kingdom of God and doing it “*like* a little child,” not *being* a little child. Jesus clarifies what it is about being *like* a child that’s important for salvation in Matthew 18:3-4. “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become *like* little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself *like* this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Clearly it’s not being a child or becoming a child that’s being commended; it’s *humility like* a child’s that gains us entrance into Heaven. We discover in Booklet 4 that the faith God looks for to begin the salvation process is faith that he can and will do what he says he will do, and that what he says is the best. Is that not the same humble faith that children have when they approach an adult, such as these children coming to Jesus? Children approach adults in humility, desiring attention or help and considering the adult to be trustworthy and to know what is best to do. God requires that we have this same humble faith, not that we shrink and suddenly become younger, although many of us would be OK with that too!

Some point to 2 Samuel 12:15-23 to suggest that all deceased children go to Heaven.⁴⁻⁵ King David’s infant son is sick, so David spends seven days fasting and praying. However, his servants come to him at the end of this time and tell him that the child is dead. David says, “I will go to him, but he will not return to me.” Since it is assumed that David’s final destination is Heaven, the statement “I will go to him” is sometimes taken to mean that he will meet his son there someday. However, David could simply be saying that he’ll eventually join the child in death. Additionally, David’s son would not have been in the current heaven or Heaven yet anyway. Nor would he have been in Hell. This part of the book is all about exploring where people go immediately after they die, child or adult, and we’ll discover that it

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turns out to be none of these places! The Bible is clear that David died but “did not ascend to heaven,” so even if he will go to his son, this would not take place in the current heaven (Acts 2:29-35). Moreover, scholars confirm that neither David nor the beliefs of his culture would have considered his son to have gone to the current heaven or Heaven either.⁶ Therefore, this passage certainly cannot be used to claim that all deceased children go to either of these postmortem locales.

Another passage where automatic salvation of children is addressed is 1 Corinthians 7:12-16, when Paul teaches that an unbelieving spouse of a Christian is “sanctified” and that their children are “holy.” What this passage means is by no means universally agreed upon, but there are four things we can ascertain. First, Paul intently makes it known in this chapter (uniquely in the Bible) that what he is saying here is his personal opinion, not necessarily the words of God, so the concept of children being holy, whatever it means, is Paul’s take on the matter, which carries no more divine authority than your take or mine. Second, Paul is clear in the last two verses that this passage does not mean that being in a family containing a Christian automatically gets you saved, which is what we would be assuming if holy did mean saved. Third, holy is a term that simply means “set apart,” applied to a huge variety of things throughout the Bible, such as God, the Sabbath, plots of land, utensils, altars, hills, names, temples, kisses, angels, and in our case, children. Since no other item on this list can or needs to undergo salvation, we shouldn’t assume that holy means saved for children either. Finally, the children are only considered holy if there is at least one believing parent. “Otherwise, your children would be unclean,” not holy. Unclean does not mean damned, just as holy does not mean saved. And if holy did mean saved, children of two unbelieving parents would not be either automatically holy or saved. So if it has anything to say in the matter, this passage actually proves that there is not automatic salvation for all children.⁷

Two other references are sometimes thought to suggest a potential link between children and salvation. First, in Matthew 21:15-16, Jesus quotes Psalm 8:2, “From the lips of children and infants you,

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Lord, have called forth your praise.” To equate shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David” with automatic salvation is a bit of a stretch. My one-year-old infant son (at the time of this writing) thanks God for plants, our house, and especially trucks. He helps us sing “Jesus Loves Me” and “My God Is So Big,” and yes, he even exuberantly shouts “Hosanna!” He is expressing gratitude to God as best he can, but there is no justification, biblical or logical, to claim that he is saved because of any of this. There are an awful lot of kids in church choirs everywhere who grow up to be people nobody would consider to be Christians, including themselves. Plus, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” “Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them” praises God (Psalm 19:1, Revelation 5:13). If all that’s required for salvation is praising God, are the heavens, skies, and every creature, including all humans, going to be saved too? Not according to the Bible (2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 21:1, Revelation 14:9-11). Rather, it’s their very existence that reflects praise, a marvelous testimony to God’s creative genius. When Matthew 21:15-16 is placed in context, Jesus is simply saying that children and even infants can praise God, so the disciples shouldn’t try to stop them. There is no mention of salvation or Heaven anywhere. In the second reference to children being linked to salvation, people argue that because the children in Matthew 18:10 are accompanied by angels, and “angels serve those who inherit salvation,” all children must be saved (Hebrews 1:14).⁸ The problem, of course, is that we are not told that all children are accompanied by angels; only these particular ones. And Jesus is clear that these specific youths “believe in me” (Matthew 18:6). They are joined by angels and have inherited salvation because they have put their faith in Jesus, not because they’re children.

Finally, we have a trio of passages demonstrating God’s involvement in people’s lives even while they were still in the womb. In Jeremiah 1:5 God knows Jeremiah before he is born. In Psalm 22:10, David says that God has been his God from his mother’s womb. And in Luke 1:15 the Holy Spirit comes upon John the Baptist whilst he is yet a fetus. All of these verses, and particularly the last one, are used to argue that all children are saved when they die.⁹ However,

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given that these three humans are among the most godly people in the Bible, even if they are considered saved as young tots, there is absolutely no reason to extrapolate this salvation to all children. We know that a person is saved when the Holy Spirit comes to *permanently* dwell in them. Salvation is always followed by this event, which is why some hold that Luke 1:15 teaches that all children are saved (2 Corinthians 1:21-22, 5:5). But Ephesians 1:13-14 gives us two significant prerequisites for receiving the Holy Spirit in this irrevocable way. “You also were included in Christ *when you heard the message of truth*, the gospel of your salvation. *When you believed*, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.” The fetuses above did not hear the message of truth and certainly weren’t able to believe it; therefore, they could not have been permanently indwelt with the Holy Spirit to guarantee their salvation. And there’s an even bigger problem. If all children are marked with the “seal” of the Holy Spirit, “guaranteeing” salvation, then every human would have to be saved. The Holy Spirit’s indwelling associated with salvation is a seal and a guarantee; he will never leave that person. Neither the saved nor the Spirit could ever go to Hell; it is a place for the unsaved where God is absent. Therefore, the person who believes that Luke 1:15 teaches that all children are automatically saved is forced to adopt universalism, which is pervasively prohibited in the Bible (Matthew 7:13-14, John 14:6, Acts 4:11-12, 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

Besides, it’s not hard to explain the state of these fetuses without invoking in utero salvation anyway. In Jeremiah’s case, God knows him before he’s born. Well of course he does; he did create him after all! God has a pretty extensive understanding of *all* people before they’re born, particularly if he has big plans for them, like he did for Jeremiah, David, and especially John the Baptist. What we aren’t assured of is that Jeremiah knew *God* at this time, so we have no reason to believe that he is saved in the womb (John 17:3). Similarly, David is also acknowledging that God knew him, protected him, and was accomplishing his purposes for David since before he was born. God was David’s God, overseeing his provision and plans for David, even though David wasn’t able to hear this truth or believe it yet

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to be saved. As for John the Baptist, Luke 1:15 is just one of many examples throughout the Bible of the Holy Spirit *temporarily* coming upon humans—both saved and unsaved—to prompt a specific action that God desired. This action of God’s Spirit is clearly different from permanently indwelling a believer for salvation.

For instance, Bezalel was filled “with the Spirit of God” for the singular purpose of bestowing skills of design, metallurgy, gemwork, woodcraft, and teaching in order to build the tabernacle (Exodus 31:1-5, 35:30-33). Seventy elders traveling with the Israelites received the Holy Spirit in order to prophecy in their camp. “When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again,” proving the transient presence of the Holy Spirit within them (Number 11:24-26). Likewise, “God changed Saul’s heart” and sends his Spirit “powerfully upon him to prophecy,” but we know that this was not connected with salvation, both because the Spirit comes on Saul multiple times and because eventually “the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul” (1 Samuel 10:10, 11:6, 16:13-14). Balaam was a man who was summoned by a king to curse Israel, but “the Spirit of God came upon him,” causing him to bless Israel instead (Number 23:27-24:9). Four times he prophesies, but only the third time are we told that the Holy Spirit is involved, suggesting a transient presence. And since we learn later that he “practiced divination,” “loved the wages of wickedness,” helped “entice the Israelites to sin,” and is listed with people who end up in Hell, the temporary presence of the Holy Spirit in a human who will not be saved is confirmed (Joshua 13:22, 2 Peter 2:15, Revelation 2:14, Jude 1:7-13). There are at least fifteen other separate accounts within the Old Testament when the Holy Spirit comes upon people, not to bring salvation, but to prompt specific deeds of strength, deliverance, prophecies, or encouragement. And these all occur prior to Pentecost, the day when the Holy Spirit began permanently indwelling believers shortly after Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 2:1-4). The gestation of John the Baptist occurs before this as well. So when taken in context with the rest of the Bible, Luke 1:15 simply shares that the Holy Spirit came upon John in utero, as he came upon the folks above, to bring deliverance by introducing Jesus to the world, to both fulfill and induce prophecy, and to prompt

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encouragement—also via transient filling with the Holy Spirit—with the best news the world has ever received (Luke 1:63-79). The only “salvation” evident in these verses is through Jesus, not through the Holy Spirit’s presence in John the fetus.

There is another big problem with automatic pediatric salvation. Three children are said to have been brought back to life in the Bible, two in the Old Testament by Elijah and Elisha and one by Jesus (1 Kings 17:17-24, 2 Kings 4:20-37, Mark 5:35-43). If all of these children went to the current heaven when they died, as some argue, isn’t it at least a little cruel to bring them back to life on earth? Given his words regarding children above, Jesus would be especially unlikely to tease them with a few minutes of heavenly bliss before yanking their spirits back here. He would be forcing a child dwelling with God in perfection to come back to earth where they would more than likely live beyond some age of accountability, after which they might very well reject the gospel! Unless all three of these resurrected children eventually demonstrated the faith associated with salvation as adults, one or more of them is going to end up in Hell. Bringing them back to life would have actually played a key role in converting their destiny from Heaven to Hell! Do you think Jesus—or Elijah and Elisha if they knew—would have taken this chance with these kids, especially when it would seem better to bring back a condemned adult from Hell for a second chance instead? Like with David’s son above, we’ll find that these kids went to a place besides the current heaven when they died, a place where their salvation was yet to be determined. This is why it was inconsequential for them to be brought back to life on earth, where their salvation was also yet to be determined.

Please know that I understand the emotional reasons for hoping those who don’t have meaningful access to the gospel are automatically saved, especially if you’ve lost a child. But think about the implications if it were true. If all children before some arbitrary age of accountability, all individuals with chronic, severe psychological handicaps, and/or all other people disconnected from the gospel were automatically saved, then abortion, extreme neglect or euthanasia of the mentally incapacitated, and horrific disasters such as the 2004

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tsunami in Aceh would actually be the most good and compassionate events describable. The sooner the earthly existence of anyone who gets a free ticket to Heaven comes to an end, the less suffering and pain they'll have to endure here on earth and the quicker they'll enter into perfection. Tragically, some *have* killed others so that the latter could be free from earthly suffering. Although absolutely inexcusable, the perpetrators were simply carrying out to its logical conclusion the belief that the victims got a special pass to Heaven.

But even more importantly, giving anyone automatic admittance into the current heaven forces God to violate his nature and be unjust. To save some no matter what while allowing others to spend forever in Hell is anything but impartial, isn't it? It's favoritism, perhaps of the least onerous kind, but favoritism nonetheless. And in the case of children, when do they lose their free ticket to Heaven? Some offer an age, such as 12, and others say it's different for every child, depending on how much they understand. But whatever day it is, if they die that day and haven't accepted Christ, will God really condemn them eternally to Hell, when death one day earlier would have landed the same kid with the same beliefs about the gospel in the current heaven? Of course not! The Bible actually details the salvation process for children and those in remote places, and unsurprisingly for a just God, it turns out to be exactly the same as for anyone else. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you *and your children and for all who are far off*—for all whom the Lord our God will call." He doesn't automatically call those who are less than 12 or live in some remote corner of Asia (or Africa if that's what you're used to); he calls those who will repent. In the end, with humble faith like a child, we will *all* need to reject our sin via the solution of Jesus to be forgiven. This is why Samuel, who if anyone would have been a shoe-in for automatic salvation as a child, "did not yet know the Lord"—a prerequisite for salvation—because "the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him" (1 Samuel 3:7, John 17:3). He was a boy, his entire life had been devoted to God, but he was not yet saved because God hadn't been revealed to Samuel yet in a way that he

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could accept or reject. This revelation would occur during physical life for those who have meaningful access to the information they need or between physical death and judgment day for those who don't.

Our emotions are not the only reason we feel drawn to accept a concept that is biblically problematic. We are also taught these concepts by those who we perceive to have authority. Unfortunately, such authority does not necessarily translate to accuracy, and our experiential and emotional biases are always at work to sway us from biblical teaching.¹⁰ For example, in Randy Alcorn's *Heaven*, you can almost feel the tension between his desires and his knowledge of God's words. He admits that children need to but can't be saved without faith in Christ. He quotes others in agreement. He acknowledges that the Bible makes no reference to an age of accountability. He rejects the universalism that is forced by the automatic salvation of children. He is "concerned" and has written specifically about "the dangerous aspects" of this doctrine. He even asks the question that may have lingered in your mind while reading this chapter: "If children do go to heaven when they die, then why doesn't God tell us that directly?" Both he and the reader seem primed and ready to reject this concept. And then in an inexplicable total reversal, especially in the light of everything we've reviewed above, he concludes, "I believe God makes a special provision for children to welcome them into heaven." How is this possible given everything he's just conceded? He doesn't tell us. Instead, he appeals to our emotions, envisioning a heaven where "many people will meet with their children who were aborted or their children who died in miscarriages," "reunited with children who died at an early age" who "will grab our hands and show us around the present heaven" and exist in a place where "we'll enjoy each other's company" and "experience it's wonder together."¹¹ Of course, this sounds pleasant, and we all might *think* we want to believe it, but there are many things people want to believe about the Bible that it clearly does not condone. And do we *really* want to believe in automatic pediatric salvation anyway? Its unavoidable consequences are not as dispensable as *Heaven* portrays them, are they?*

* Randy Alcorn offers many valuable insights regarding Heaven and many other topics, and I mean no disrespect to him, as elaborated upon here.¹²

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In actuality, this doctrine is far from harmless or compassionate. It proves itself wrong, misrepresents the Bible, mandates universalism, enables children's destinies to be switched from Heaven to Hell, provides horrifically logical reasons for killing children and billions of others, and violates God's nature! This list should go a long way in removing most—if not all—of automatic pediatric salvation's emotional appeal. All of these reasons are precisely why God *doesn't* tell us directly that every child goes to Heaven. That being said, I certainly understand that you still may have in your mind a little one whom you love dearly but have lost. If it's still emotionally difficult to acknowledge that there's no automatic pass to the pearly gates, it may help to remember that it wouldn't be a child or mentally-handicapped individual going to Hell or the current heaven. It would be a spirit, one as "adult" as yours, just within a body that didn't get a chance to physically function as an adult. Separating your physical perception of a person—the last memory you have of them—from their true, eternal identity as a human spirit is crucial to emotionally understanding why God judges them and us the same. This impartiality doesn't mean that the child you thought was in the current heaven all this time is really in Hell. It simply means that his spirit, which is just as mature and capable as yours, will be judged according to the same standard that you are. Just as you would not show favoritism to one of your children over another, simply because they've lived different lengths of time, so God does not show favoritism to his children either (Acts 10:34-35). And in the end, isn't that as it should be, truly the best way? Absolutely! Our just God must give us all the same choice, the same solution, and enough information to leave us without an excuse. And once we finish this part of the book, we'll know exactly how he does just that.

3

The biblical notion of giving the unevangelized dead exposure to the gospel may be a new and exciting possibility to you, but

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perhaps you are wondering why it would even be necessary. Why do people without meaningful access to the gospel, such those who lived before Jesus, who were isolated from available information about Jesus, who died too young to understand him, or who were mentally incapable of comprehending the gospel, even need to be saved? The answer's easy with the first two groups, as these folks are all quite capable of choosing to sin and know evil, and they have done so. Moreover, God has revealed to humanity enough about himself and what he values, both through the world around us and through our ability to morally reason, that we have no excuse when choosing to sin and know evil. This is often called God's general revelation and is stated most clearly in Romans 1:18-20. Importantly, this revelation cannot and was never meant to convey the gospel, so no one is going to be sent to Hell because they didn't accept Jesus' message that was not so obviously apparent through creation and moral reasoning alone. Rather, the purpose of general revelation is essentially to give us a conscience, leaving us without the excuse that we can't be blamed for sin because we didn't know what sin was. If you can process the world around you and morally reason, you have no excuse for opting to sin and know evil. Even when people who are not exposed to God's decrees "do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them" (Romans 2:14-15).

But while this may *generally* apply to humans, has the stillborn fetus or the deceased lifelong severely mentally handicapped person chosen to sin? Are they imperfect? We don't see any physical demonstration of sin, although their spirits within them may choose to do so. Remember, the true selves of these people are not bodies bobbing in amniotic fluid or motionless in a coma; they are free-willed spirits, perfectly capable of sinning. It is the spirit, not the body, which would provide the tenacious originality to will to choose evil. And if these spirits do go somewhere between physical death and final judgment, at which time Jesus preaches his message to them, they will have both the means and plenty of time to sin, won't they?

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But there is a much more immediate reason these people need God's salvation anyway. When the first two fully human beings were formed—the first created in God's image with a free-willed spirit—they used that will to choose to know evil. God's just punishment was also the consequence of their choice, existing within a physical realm that immerses humans in an imperfect experience of evil. Humans can't fully know and understand evil without being exposed to it in an imperfect environment. That is why God curses the ground in response to human sin (Genesis 3:17-19). It's not that he doesn't like the ground or that the ground did wrong. He approves of the world that he made and is quite unhappy with those who destroy it (Genesis 1:31, Revelation 11:18). Rather, the ground is one mechanism that God uses to bring about his just punishment on *humans*. He curses the land because not being able to grow food and having crops overrun by thorns and thistles, despite great labor and toil, is a very tangible part of humans experiencing the evil they want to know, and it continues to be today. Any way that nature inflicts suffering on us, whether small like mosquito bites or large like earthquakes, is a way that the world has become an imperfect place for humans experiencing evil. Adam and Eve were banished from the perfect natural balance in the garden to the disease and disaster-ridden natural imbalance outside of the garden. Wherever they went, the world that they lived in was now imperfect or cursed because the consequence and punishment for their sin was to know and understand evil, whether it was evil that they were experiencing or evil that they were inflicting. Everything that arises from such an imperfect world will also be imperfect.

Humans are no exception. When God creates a human spirit and joins this "inmost being" with a human body for physical life at conception (Psalm 139:13, Jeremiah 1:5), that human being—body and spirit—exists subject to and within the confines of an imperfect world, exposed to the human knowledge and understanding of evil. From fertilization to funeral, imperfection is always at work in our bodies, spirits, motives, thoughts, and actions. Our bodies are immediately vulnerable to the experience of evil and death by disease or other means, and they remain susceptible to accident or ailment as long

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as they live. Our spirits are also trapped within a world of knowing and understanding evil, the only filter through which they gain information and the only context in which they can process it. Therefore, this part of us imbued with free will is predisposed to sin and is inclined to experience evil and understand it in whatever way it is capable, even if that can never be physically expressed to others. Every parent knows how shockingly early children exhibit disobedience and rebellion. As I write this, my son is 19 months old, and as great a kid as he is, his tendency toward defiance and choosing to experience anything other than his father's will is obvious. That sounds exactly like our description of sin, doesn't it? "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). "Humanity, once having chosen selfishness, was bent in that direction."¹³ Knowing evil is every person's *modus operandi*, our MO, or our mode of operating for those of you who really dislike Latin. This imperfection is reflected in our motives, thoughts, and actions continuously, and without some sort of extraterrestrial injection of perfection to redirect us, our MO will never change.

This inclination toward evil bears the theological terms "sinful nature," "original sin," or for those looking for a real pick-me-up, "total depravity!" Since only the first is a term you'll see in the Bible, we'll stick with that one. Different connotations may come to mind when you read "sinful nature," so let me explain what I mean by it. Every free-willed human that has been born was born after Adam and Eve sinned, so essentially all humans are physically and spiritually imperfect, inclined to think and act to know and understand evil. They naturally sin; they have a sinful nature. "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time" (Genesis 6:5). The concept of a sinful nature is very often assumed or taught, but without any rationalization for why it exists in the first place. I don't know that the explanation provided above is right, but at least we have one, and I hope it makes sense to both of us. However, as our sinful nature may still be either too unfamiliar or too familiar to you, I'd like to make four clarifications to clear up any confusion.

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First, the sinful nature is not a state of guilt that was inherited from Adam and Eve through some sort of spiritual DNA that “passes on to one’s children.”¹⁴ Adam and Eve’s sinning spirits did not have spiritual sex that made little Cain, Abel, and Seth sinful spirits in a spiritual uterus. We don’t have a sinful nature because Adam, Eve, or our parents did. We are imperfect and inclined to evil because we are entities that arose in a world that is an imperfect experience of evil. Adam and Eve were originally responsible for that world, as it was made imperfect so that they could know and understand the evil that they had chosen, which is why “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:18). But every human after them—including you and me—continually perpetuates that imperfection multiple times a day.

Second, the sinful nature is not a distinct component of our being, like a spiritual spleen. We have a body and a spirit, the latter being similar to the soul or mind. A being’s nature is not a discrete part of it; it’s what that being is all about, what characterizes it. When we talk about God’s nature, we don’t speak of organs; we speak of attributes, like mercy, justice, and love. These are what God is all about, the inclinations that guide his actions—his MO. The human sinful nature is imperfection inclined toward evil; it’s all about understanding and knowing evil.

Third, our sinful nature does not *force* us to sin. It is a *predisposition* to sin. Our free will is ultimately responsible for sin, but our sinful nature makes it a lot harder for our free will to say no. So we cannot blame Adam and Eve for our sin; we can only blame them for making it more difficult to reject sin. However, every time we sin, we perpetuate the imperfection of our world, which helps to perpetuate sinful natures in those born after us, who can then blame us for the same thing. This difficulty rejecting sin is why humans will never live perfect lives, despite their best efforts. “For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (Romans 7:18-19). Is there any human who doesn’t identify with this struggle? No, because we all have a sinful nature!

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This evil inclination is also why God sending his Spirit to dwell in Christians is so crucial. Our sinful nature remains when we become Christians, but we are to “put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature” (Colossians 3:5). “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13). “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature” (Galatians 5:16-17). The Holy Spirit is the injection of perfection from *outside* our imperfect world that allows us to much more successfully break free of our inclination to evil caused by our world. He frees us from our MO to operate according to God’s MO—God’s attributes and inclinations.

Fourth, although our sinful nature is not responsible for our sin, its imperfection and evil inclinations disqualify every human being from Heaven. A place of perfect community with God cannot include spiritual imperfection and evil inclination (we would have shed our physical imperfection by then). So even before an individual has used his free will to sin, his sinful nature has already sealed his need for God’s solution of Jesus and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Why do you think this solution had to be God in human form? Only a divine human, conceived by the Holy Spirit and able to reason and act independently of the imperfect filter by which we gain and process information offered by this earthly experience, could be a reliable sinless savior without a sinful nature, one deserving of Heaven (Matthew 1:20-21). Jesus did not have a sinful nature and never chose to sin; therefore, he is *perfectly* capable of saving us. The rest of us all possess sinful natures and imperfect spirits, unfit for Heaven because there can be no tainted perceptions of God and good and no inclination toward evil present there to mar its perfection. This is the primary reason that those who die very young or those who die with lifelong mental incapacitation are not perfect and need a way to understand and accept the message of Jesus to be made perfect. Besides, whether their spirit chooses to sin during physical life or between death and judgment, their sinful nature certainly inclines them to do so at any time. They will eventually sin

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anyway—as we all have—but their sinful nature makes them imperfect regardless, disqualified for Heaven. They need God’s postmortem preaching!

4

OK, maybe the babies and brain-injured among us don’t get special treatment, still needing the solution of Jesus for multiple reasons. But perhaps you feel that God doesn’t teach the gospel to some humans after death because he gives *everyone*, including the two parties above, enough information while they are *alive* to make an informed salvation decision without an excuse. Others of you might believe that God has selected those who will be saved before he even created the universe. In both cases, a person’s eternal fate is always fixed before they physically die, never after. These are popular beliefs and conflict with what I’ve shared above, so let’s spend some time on them. We’ll consider the first scenario here and cover the second scenario in Booklet 4.

The following is primarily why some folks argue that everyone gets enough information during physical life to make their decision about Jesus’ message before they die, whether they actually hear it or not. “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse” (Romans 1:18-20). “He has not left himself without testimony: he has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy” (Acts 14:17). These verses describe the general revelation introduced to you in the last chapter that God gives to anyone who can witness creation and morally reason. Its purpose is to leave us with a conscience and

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without the excuse of sinning guiltlessly. Obviously, our sinful nature establishes our imperfection too, both for those able and unable to experience creation. But some include the gospel (God's special revelation, if you will) in this general revelation, simply because "what may be known about God is plain" to humans in creation. No need for anyone to receive additional information between death and judgment, which would mean that all people are without an excuse to reject Jesus' message by the time they kick the bucket, including babies, the mentally disabled, and those for whom the word Jesus is completely meaningless.

But isn't it quite a stretch to assume that simply learning about God's power, nature, and kindness automatically bestows a full understanding of specifically what Jesus has done for us in the gospel? Not to mention the fact that fetuses and the chronically and severely brain-injured aren't able to meaningfully witness this physical creation or morally reason, so they wouldn't have meaningful access to Jesus' message even if it *were* somehow apparent in God's general revelation. The key to distinguishing learning about God through the world around us and learning about God's solution of Jesus is to understand exactly what the excuse is that general revelation leaves us without. When able humans experience "what may be known about God" in creation, they no longer have the excuse to sin without guilt; their exposure to the world and their ability to morally reason within it gives them a conscience that convicts them, whether they respond appropriately to that conviction or not (Romans 2:12-15). However, general revelation, in and of itself, *does* leave humans with the excuse of not believing the gospel, because it does not specifically communicate the gospel to enable them to believe it. So because every capable human learns about God's power, nature, and kindness through creation, the excuse for their "godlessness and wickedness" to escape "the wrath of God" is gone, but God will not exercise that judgment of Hell on them until he has specifically taught them his solution of Jesus, which only *then* leaves them without the additional excuse of having no meaningful access to that solution to respond to.

And that is exactly what Paul is arguing as he elaborates on the specifics of these excuses in Romans 1:18-2:16. His readers "have no

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excuse” to “pass judgment on someone else” because general revelation has left both the accuser and the accused equally guilty, as they sin and “do the same things” (Romans 2:1). Rejecting the gospel is not one of these same things that both parties do to leave them without an excuse, because Paul’s readers are Christians in Rome who have accepted the gospel (Romans 1:7)! But both parties *have* inexcusably, knowingly sinned, given what they’ve learned about God from creation and given their ability to morally reason. General revelation exposes the guilt of humanity’s sin, not the guilt of snubbing God’s solution to that sin. Therefore, God does not teach humans the gospel during physical life simply by their exposure to the physical world.

After all, God’s wrath and judgment are being applied to the specific people in Romans 1:18-2:16 not only because they defied God’s general revelation by inexcusably sinning, but because they rejected the gospel as well! These are individuals “who suppress the truth by their wickedness,” “did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God,” and “neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.” Paul goes on to describe the “shameful” and “depraved” actions that characterize this distinct group of people. “Although *they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death*, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.” Obviously, these attributes are not applicable to humanity as a whole, especially the vast majority of people without meaningful access to Jesus’ message. Those who “know God’s righteous decree” that sin deserves death have both received God’s general revelation of a moral conscience *and* learned at least part of his special revelation of the gospel. In contrast, those who can’t suppress this truth because they have no knowledge of God to refuse can, at best, only recognize God’s general revelation in creation. Individuals who have always been mentally incapacitated don’t suppress God’s truth, those separated from the gospel by time or place can’t let go of the knowledge of God’s gospel that they don’t have, and infants don’t voluntarily refuse to glorify God or thank him (although they are occasionally less than thankful toward their parents!). For God to be just to these groups of people, he has to specially reveal his solution to them in a way other than learning about him solely through

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his physical creation.

God could bypass their body and brain completely, communicating the gospel to their spirit directly while they were alive, but can a spirit associated with a body detect such communication independent of the body? What has God demonstrably taught your spirit without using some sort of physical stimulus? And if God can bypass some people's bodies to talk with their spirits, why not do that with all of us? God appealing to our physical bodies through a physical creation would seem quite unnecessary, wouldn't it? And at least in the case of a mentally handicapped person, even if their spirit did believe in what God taught it directly, it would have no way of bodily applying the gospel in physical life, as their unhealthy brain wouldn't make that connection possible, so what would the point be? It makes a lot more sense to believe that while our spirit is associated with our bodies, it can only respond to a physical presentation of God's solution, which means that a just God must reach those who have no meaningful access to such a presentation sometime after their spirit has left their bodies. Between death and judgment. And since we already know that God reaches postmortem spirits in the Bible anyway, this comes as no surprise.

5

I've repeatedly alluded to a period between a person's death and the day when everyone is judged, which begs an obvious question: what happens immediately after we die? Perhaps you believe quite fervently that the Hitlers, Stalins, and bin Ladens of the world took a non-stop flight to burn in Hell forever when their corpses gave up the ghost. Or maybe you were under the impression that your beloved spouse, your best friend, or your revered great-grandmother has been watching you from the current heaven above ever since their lives here came to a close. Although such ideas may bring a sense of justice, peace, and security, these feelings often unfortunately confuse the portrait God paints about our first stop in the hereafter. In fact,

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we will learn that the Bible persistently teaches that human beings *do not* go to either Hell or the current heaven (or the New Earth) immediately after dying. For those that are surprised to hear this, I assure you, it sounds more radical than it really is. By the end of this part of the book, I think you'll agree that what I'm proposing is not much different from the common notion that right after death, those destined for Hell go somewhere hellish and those destined for Heaven go somewhere heavenly, where they can remember and observe the living. So if the next few chapters present new or foreign ideas to you, remind yourself that they will conclude on a relatively familiar note—but also on a more biblically consistent and logically powerful note. The interval between life on earth and life in our eternal destinations clearly does exist in the Bible and for several good reasons, not the least of which is to allow us to answer yet more crucial questions concerning the afterlife that we couldn't otherwise. And of all the people who would know the answers, Jesus has the most to say.

Regarding those who had already died, Jesus says, “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man” (John 3:13). When Jesus—who called himself the Son of Man—spoke these words, he was the only human who had been to the current heaven. Regarding his followers who would die after that time he says, “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later” (John 13:36). Jesus would soon ascend to be with God the Father, where his disciples can't go yet, but they will follow later. Why can't they go yet, and when will they be able to go? Jesus explains, “A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear God's voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28-29). “For my Father's will is that *everyone* who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise *them* up at the last day” (John 6:40). God “has set a day when he will judge the world” (Acts 17:31), and all who have died before then will be raised on that last day to be judged. In Hebrews 11 we are given a long list of individuals who were commended for great faith in God to their dying day and who were looking forward to being with him. “They were longing for a

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better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.” “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that *only together with us* would they be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:16, 39-40). We know that you can’t go to the current heaven until you’ve been made perfect, so as long as there will be saved people on earth who haven’t been made perfect yet and accepted into the current heaven, the folks in Hebrews haven’t yet either. We don’t find the “righteous made perfect” until they dwell in the “heavenly Jerusalem” of the New Earth after judgment day (Hebrews 12:22-23, Revelation 21:1-4)! So far, God’s words seem to contradict an immediate postmortem trip to the current heaven.

But some argue that since “the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it,” people’s spirits must go to the current heaven upon dying, while their bodies remain on earth to be resurrected later (Ecclesiastes 12:7).¹⁵ However, the passages in the last paragraph don’t merely speak of dead bodies being raised, they clearly refer to whole people, body and spirit, human beings rather than human bodies. After all, decomposed bodies can’t “hear God’s voice and come out,” right (John 5:28-29)? Only sentient spirits can. Moreover, there is no distinction in Ecclesiastes 12:7 between spirits going to the current heaven and those going to Hell. If this verse teaches that spirits do go to the current heaven right when they die, then *all* of them do, and nobody goes to Hell. As we have learned and will continue to learn, the Bible unequivocally excludes this interpretation, so the only other possibility is that all spirits return to God at some other time besides immediately after physical death. There is only one biblical example of such an inclusive gathering, and that is judgment day, when Jesus—God the Son—separates those going to Hell and those going to Heaven. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. *All* the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another.” The unsaved “will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matthew 25:31-32,46). So our physical bodies do return to the

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ground and decay when we die, but our spirits don't return to God until judgment day.*

Jesus promises his disciples that he is going to the current heaven to prepare a place for them. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:3). His disciples don't go to be with him until *after* the second coming of Jesus, not before. Human salvation is only "ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:4-6). Paul confirms this. "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who *sleep in death*, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from Heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and *the dead in Christ will rise first*. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be *caught up together with them* in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Note that the only human to "come down from heaven" is Jesus, which means that no other humans were in the current heaven to descend with him and meet us, even though some claim this.¹⁸ God will not *send* with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him; he will "*bring*" them to Heaven with Jesus after they are resurrected. The text even directly parallels their resurrection, which brings them to Heaven, with Jesus' resurrection prior to his ascension, which brings him to the current heaven. Jesus does not resurrect in spirit, leave his body behind, and go to the current heaven, thereby enabling our spirits to leave our bodies behind upon dying and go there too. Jesus resurrects in his imperishable body to go to the current heaven, enabling our spirits to be resurrected in our

* If you're wondering if people who were brought back to life in the Bible were able to go to the current heaven or if Jesus' resurrection enables humans to go there before judgment day, you'll find this helpful.¹⁶

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imperishable bodies to go to Heaven on the last day. He and we go respectively *to* the current heaven or Heaven *after* our bodily resurrection; we don't come from these places *to be* resurrected into imperishable bodies. Every single human except Jesus in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, whether dead or living, is "caught up together," for the purpose of meeting Christ; they're not meeting any other humans. You don't "sleep in death," get "caught up," or "meet the Lord in the air" if you were already there with him, right? When Jesus returns to judge humanity, those who end up in Heaven—whether they were already dead or still living—go there together. Jesus himself confirms this in Matthew 25:31-32. There are angels with him when he comes, but no humans, just as there are angels with Jesus in the current heaven now, but no humans (1 Peter 3:21-22).

What about those whose ultimate destination isn't Heaven? They also must wait until the last day. "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to Tartarus (*a place we'll address further in Chapter 15*) putting them in chains of darkness *to be held for judgment...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment*" (2 Peter 2:4-9). One passage even gives us examples of those who are saved and those who are not both having to wait to be judged together. Jesus reminds us of the people of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and then the Queen of Sheba, a land south of Israel in what is believed to be modern Yemen or Ethiopia. After getting puked up by a fish, the prophet Jonah finds the typically wicked Ninevites ready to turn to God (Jonah 1:1, 2:10-3:10). Likewise, after the Queen of Sheba saw the Israelite King Solomon's wisdom, she worshipped God (1 Kings 10:1-9). Comparing these people to some of his contemporaries, Jesus claims, "The men of Nineveh *will stand up at the judgment with this generation* and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South *will rise at the judgment with this generation* and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:41-42). Remember that this judgment is the day when all humans are resurrected to be resigned to their eternal abodes of Gehenna or

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the New Earth, and now we know that it doesn't happen right after each of us dies.

Scholars and philosophers agree. In the “two-stage process” of the afterlife, “resurrection isn't life after death; it is life *after* life after death.”¹⁹ “Eternal life could only mean the body coming back to life on judgment day,” when the righteous dead “wake up to enjoy a kingdom of God.”²⁰ This just makes sense. Obviously, we don't all die at even remotely the same time, and it's clear from multiple verses above that there is only one judgment day. We won't know when it is until it comes—only God knows that—but it will come, and we will all be resurrected to participate in it (Matthew 24:35-36). As the Bible, scholars, and philosophers concur, despite the common belief amongst Christians that “they'll ‘go directly to heaven’ when they die,” “the orthodox monotheisms actually teach that the trip to the next world is a two-part journey. You go somewhere when you die. And then you go to another place at the end of the world.”²¹ We live, we die, we wait, we rise, we are judged, and lastly we go to our final destination (and unlike the movie series, it really is final).

6

The Bible is quite clear about the postmortem process that humans undergo, but there are some folks that seem to be an exception to this rule. Some of you may have been waiting very patiently for me to address them, and now I will. Let me remind you that I don't claim my words below to be truth, and the circumstances surrounding some of these folks are uncertain, regardless of what conclusion is drawn. I only desire to find the most logical explanation that remains consistent with everything the Bible says, and I hope you'll agree that what we end up with does exactly that. We have accounts of three individuals in the Bible who may have gone to the current heaven while still alive and five examples of those who seem to have been headed there immediately after they died.

The first three are Paul, Elijah, and Enoch. Paul, speaking of

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himself anonymously, “was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). There were at least three levels of heaven in the Jewish mindset: the earth’s atmosphere, outer space, and the highest heaven where God and his angels dwell, the third heaven (Luke 2:14).²² Lucky Paul gets an actual glimpse of what this heaven of heavens is like, although he is hazy on the details of how it all went down (or up in this case). Because of this uncertainty, because this getaway wasn’t in any way connected with Paul’s death, and because Paul obviously resumed his physical existence to write to us about it afterwards, it’s doubtful that this account has anything to say at all about whether or not people go to the current heaven right after they die, isn’t it? For similar reasons, the same is true regarding John being “in the Spirit” as he received his vision of the current heaven in Revelation 4:2.

Well, what about Elijah, the great prophet of Israel? As he passed on the prophet torch (or prophet cloak as it were) to his young apprentice Elisha, “Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind” (2 Kings 2:11). Very cool! But which heaven? There are three types! Did the whirlwind take him up to the sky, to outer space, or to the third heaven? Unless Elijah was a closet diehard Trekkie, he probably wasn’t beamed up to outer space, and we have five very good reasons why heaven here simply means sky. First, we are told that Elijah only went up to heaven, not the highest heaven or the third heaven. Twelve times the biblical writers are careful to specify exactly when they’re speaking of the highest heaven, such as Paul above, and five of these times, they make sure to distinguish just “the heavens” from “the highest heaven,” including the author of 1 and 2 Kings, which were originally one book (Deuteronomy 10:14, 1 Kings 8:27, 2 Chronicles 2:6, 6:18, Nehemiah 9:6). Since this same author specifies that Elijah went to just “heaven” and not “the highest heaven,” he most likely only went into the sky, not to be with God.

Second, this makes the most sense in context. If a whirlwind takes a person anywhere, it’s into the sky. Therefore, the only place we *know*

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Elijah went is into the sky, based on the text. And whirlwinds don't exactly have the ability to whisk someone through the earth's atmosphere and across outer space, since there is no air to whirl there. It would be much different if the verse said "and then Elijah died and went to heaven." In this case, Elijah would have no business being in the sky, and "heaven" would much more likely mean the highest heaven. But when you toss a whirlwind into the story, going airborne is expected.

Next, of *all* the hundreds of other times the Old Testament mentions heaven, how many talk about a human going there immediately upon dying? Zero. Double-check me if you wish. To the Hebrew writers, the third heaven was a place for God, not humans. "The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to mankind" (Psalm 115:16). These writers taught that humans went to the realm of the dead called Sheol when they died, and anything that happened after that was somewhat uncertain to them. Even in Old Testament speculations that we have about humans joining God someday in the future, the humans go to Sheol first (1 Samuel 2:6, Job 14:13-17, 19:26, Psalm 49:15, 71:20). This belief of the Hebrews is consistently maintained (Psalm 89:48), so it wouldn't make sense for them to suddenly depart from it only in Elijah's case without any explanation. Why not break the rule for Abraham, the first Jew? Why not for Moses, the great liberator and lawgiver? Because going to the current heaven was a foreign concept to the Hebrew writers, so it's quite unlikely they would tell us that Elijah went there.

The fourth reason the destination of Elijah's whirlwind tour was most likely the sky is that Jesus says he didn't go to heaven. "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man" (John 3:13). Being God, Jesus is clearly speaking of the third heaven.

Finally, Elijah's imperfect, physical body couldn't exist in the perfect current heaven anyway. So the terminology and context of 2 Kings 2:11, the Hebrews' understanding of heaven, Jesus himself, and the futility of transporting a perishable body to the current heaven all demonstrate that Elijah was simply taken up into the sky by the whirlwind, perhaps as a way to supernaturally confirm God's

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approval of Elijah and God's presence to his successor Elisha. Elijah must have experienced physical death at some point following his thrill ride and subsequently arrived as a spirit in Sheol. Even such a great prophet as he has to wait there for the day of judgment like everybody else, when "the time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the *prophets* and your people who revere your name, both great and small" (Revelation 11:18).

Enoch rounds out the top three. "By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away" (Hebrews 11:5). What we aren't told is *where* he was taken. Apparently, neither Elijah nor Enoch died a typical earthly death; they were both taken while alive and couldn't be found (2 Kings 2:16-17). If Enoch truly *never* died and went straight to the current heaven, then he must have been sinless, not deserving death, and therefore wouldn't need Jesus to get there. But none of us are sinless, and none of us can come to our Father in heaven except through his solution of Jesus (Romans 3:23, John 14:6). So unless we're willing to uproot some major and pervasive themes in the Bible, neither Elijah nor Enoch could have immediately gone to the current heaven. Both were taken from this life in imperfect, perishable bodies that cannot exist in the perfect current heaven, and neither had access to this heaven anyway, as Jesus had not yet removed their sin or its punishment. Some admit this but still argue that God allowed these two men and their bodies to go there.²³ However, if God is willing to bypass Jesus for them and allow imperfection into heaven, then why is Jesus' perfection necessary for anyone else?

Besides, the Bible offers a better explanation of Enoch's situation, one free of such conundrums. Jesus assures us, just after his friend Lazarus dies, that "whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:26). Because Lazarus lived and believed in Jesus, yet still died, which would have been obvious to those listening to Jesus, he is clearly not referring to physical death. Rather, by "never die" he could only mean eternal life in Heaven for those who are saved. Enoch "walked faithfully with God," so he will almost certainly be included among the saved (Genesis 5:24). Therefore, the claim in Hebrews 11:5

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that “he did not experience death” may simply refer to the fact that he will have eternal life in Heaven, just like the claim that Christians “will never die” refers to the same. Interestingly, the Genesis account of Enoch does *not* specifically claim that he doesn’t die. It’s not until *after* Jesus’ promise was made in John 11:26 that we learn this in Hebrews. Could it be that the author of Hebrews, unlike the author of Genesis, was able to add this detail about Enoch because Jesus’ promise now existed to reveal that the saved would “not experience death” by inheriting eternal life? Sure, why not? And regardless of what happened when Enoch was taken, we now have plenty of reasons to believe that it was not to the current heaven. “For the authors of the Torah (*including Genesis*), heaven was the home of God and his angels, but it was not the dwelling of humans or anything resembling humans.” “The patriarchs had no heaven,” because the current heaven was “inaccessible” and “forbidden.”²⁴⁻²⁵

We can conclude then that the examples of Paul, Elijah, and Enoch offer no biblically consistent proof that they went to the current heaven immediately following death. Besides, you have to admit that these are three very unique circumstances, and these accounts should hardly serve as the standard model for all humans anyway. Regarding Elijah and Enoch, it has even been argued from the scholarly standpoint that, wherever they were taken, “there is no doubt that they are meant to be exceptions.”²⁶ After all, how many folks do you know who were whisked away by God or who were slurped up to heaven by a tornado? Unless you live in an Oklahoma trailer park, your answer’s probably something less than one!

7

Alright, we’ve dealt with the top three; how about the bottom five? What about those who seem to be already in or headed for the current heaven, not while alive, but after they die? The bottom five are a group of martyred saints described in the biblical book of Revelation, Paul, Stephen, Elijah with Moses, and the repentant criminal

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who was crucified next to Jesus. Since the account of the criminal explains an important aspect of the afterlife that we'll unpack in Chapter 9, we'll address him there. For now let's take a look at the first four.

There are four passages in Revelation definitively confirming that at least some humans are in the current heaven before judgment day, and they all seem to be referring to the same people group: martyrs who are uniquely resurrected before the rest of humanity to help Jesus rule over the earth for a period of time prior to judgment day (Revelation 7:9-17, 14:1-5, 15:2-4, 20:4-6). Presumably because of their sacrifice, they are the only humans who take part in this "first resurrection," although it still does not occur until the apocalypse has already begun. They "came to life (*the first resurrection*) and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life (*the second resurrection on judgment day*) until the thousand years were ended" (Revelation 20:4-5). We first meet these martyrs in Revelation 6:9-11, and I do not include this passage with the four above because we have several indications that these saints are *not* in the current heaven at this point. Although some use this passage to argue that there are humans there right now, the demeanor and circumstances of the martyrs here is vastly different than in the other four passages, where they clearly are in the current heaven. Let's take a closer look.

In Revelation 6:9-11, the apostle John sees "under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained." Parts of John's vision in Revelation take place in the current heaven, so some assume that these martyrs are there too. But if they are with a perfect God in his perfect heaven, why are they crying out in sorrow and frustration? And why are they *under* an altar? Altars are big piles of heavy rocks that are firmly situated on the ground, not fluffy, floating objects you can happily stroll under in the current heaven! To be under an altar is to be in the ground, and this makes sense once we consider the association between the altar and these saints. Whether symbolically or literally, their lives were sacrificed like an animal on an altar as a result of persecution for their faith. These sacrifices did not

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take place in the current heaven, but *on earth*, and these martyrs are most likely under a symbolic or literal earthly altar because that is where they died and entered Sheol, the Jews' underground realm of the dead. Even John distinguishes those who are "in heaven" from those who are "under the earth" right before introducing us to these saints (Revelation 5:3)! Repeatedly throughout Revelation, he is able to see events occurring in the current heaven and on earth at the same time (e.g. Revelation 12:1-17), so it shouldn't surprise us that he can simultaneously see both what's going on in the former and these saints' response to it on the latter. And immediately following the description of these saints, the earth is precisely where John's eyes are looking (Revelation 6:12-17). The saints "called out in a loud voice" to God because they clearly weren't in community with him in the current heaven! In fact, we are given a very detailed account of its inhabitants at this time from Revelation 5:1 all the way up to this passage. No definitive non-Jesus human presence is evident at all, which is exactly what we would expect in the Jewish concept of this heaven of heavens. God is there, as well as millions of angels and even creatures, enjoying a more impressive musical display than you ever thought possible! So if humans are present, is everyone having a great time except them? The celebration occurring there sounds nothing like what the martyrs are experiencing, does it?

Maybe that's because it isn't. These sorrowful, frustrated saints who are stuck under an altar associated with their death on earth don't really seem to be at the starkly non-human party in the current heaven, do they? Rather, these "souls" are more likely spirits waiting in Sheol, unsurprisingly operating according to the same biblical post-mortem process as every other human. Indeed, scholarly interpretation asserts that Revelation 6:9-11 "speaks, as do many Jewish writings of the period, of the dead waiting patiently, and sometimes not so patiently, for the time when they will finally be raised to new life."²⁷ Moreover, the response to the saints' frustration is not an invitation to join the heavenly fiesta, as would be expected if they were present to simply walk out onto the dance floor. Instead, they are "told to wait," until the number of martyrs God wants to take part in the first resurrection have died to join them in Sheol. Only after *all*

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of these Christians are killed, following a period of intense persecution and slaughter during the apocalypse called the “great tribulation,” does the first resurrection occur, after which we *do* see them acting as if they truly were in the current heaven (Revelation 7:9-17).

No one knows exactly when this tribulation takes place, but if at least this part of Revelation is chronological (apocalyptic literature is not always), then it has to happen before this passage, and the only events suggesting tribulation prior to it are those throughout Revelation 6, when the first wave of God’s wrath is unleashed. The tumult caused by these events would certainly create scenarios conducive to Christians being martyred, and they occur both before and after we first meet the martyrs crying out to God. This perfectly grooves with everything we’ve learned about them. The tribulation starts (6:1-8), some saints are martyred and go to Sheol where they are each “given a white robe” and told to wait until the rest of those martyred during the tribulation join them (6:9-11), the tribulation continues (6:12-14) with more saints killed, and “after this” all these martyrs “in white robes” “who have come out of the great tribulation” participate in the first resurrection and appear before Jesus’ throne (7:9-17). For the first time, humans other than Jesus gain access to the current heaven!

The change in their demeanor obviously parallels their change in location. Quite simply, they join the party, with Revelation 7:9-17, 14:1-5, and 15:2-4 all very closely resembling the celebration we witnessed in 5:6-14, except that humans are now unquestionably present. The two witnesses in Revelation 11:3-12 are part of this group of human martyrs included in the first resurrection, as presumably during the tribulation—we are not told when—these “men” get attacked and killed on earth for their prophesying, are brought back to life, and go up to the current heaven, just like the others. Once the martyrs are there, instead of being sorrowful, “God will wipe every tear from their eyes.” Instead of being frustrated, they are “victorious.” Instead of shouting pleas to God, “they sang a *new* song.”

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A new song for a new place and a new life!*

Alright, that's a lot of martyr minutia! Let's summarize and move on. There will be martyrs in the current heaven arriving from Sheol before judgment day, but only after the first resurrection following the great tribulation during the apocalypse. Their time in the current heaven will be relatively short as they are brought to life specifically to rule with Jesus here on earth between the first and second resurrections. Other than these martyrs, no humans will leave Sheol to enter the current heaven, the New Earth, or Gehenna until the second resurrection on judgment day.

OK, on to the second example of those who seem to go to the current heaven immediately after dying. What does Paul confirm about our first postmortem destination? Well, as he ponders all his difficulties on earth and his future in Heaven, he desires "to depart and be with Christ" (Philippians 1:21-25). He "would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" because he knows that "as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6-8). To start, the current heaven is nowhere to be found in these passages, and there's a very simple explanation for how we would not go there upon dying and yet still encounter Christ. We'll explore it in Chapter 9, and it fully accounts for and is consistent with Paul's words above. However, there also are very good reasons Paul is not even arguing that we'll reside with Christ as soon as we die. First, the latter passage may simply be teaching that if you're quite attached to life in this world (very "at home" in the body), you are not very close to God, as confirmed in James 4:4. Additionally, the only claim made in these verses is that we are away from and not at home with the Lord when we are in the body. If you look carefully, there is nothing in either of these texts claiming that we are with or at home with the Lord as soon as we are away from the body, is there? These verses are often misquoted or misrepresented in an effort to create evidence for immediate transit to the current heaven following death.³⁴⁻³⁵ "The apostle Paul said that to die was to

* To more thoroughly establish that Revelation does not describe a non-Jesus human presence in the current heaven before the first resurrection, warp here.²⁸

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be with Christ, and to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord.”³⁶ Not true. Paul simply states his desire for two separate things: to depart and be away from the body and to be at home with Christ, but he does not equate the two or claim that they are simultaneous events.

Similarly, you or I might describe a business trip out of state by stating, “I would prefer to be away from work and at home with my family,” since “as long as I am at work I am away from my family.” As much as I might like to be embraced by my wife and son immediately upon exiting the conference room, there is a pretty long journey waiting for me between finishing the meeting and finally arriving home. So it is for us all, as we experience a time of waiting before we reach our ultimate destination. Similar to our motive in verbally anticipating such a wonderful homecoming, Paul’s purpose is to express his longing for Heaven while he endures trials on earth that he finds necessary but wearisome, not to instruct us that physical death immediately precedes being with Jesus. After all, we know from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 that Paul does not consider departing this life and being with Christ to be closely consecutive events, as the deceased who are saved “sleep in death” and only rise after Jesus’ second coming. This sounds exactly like the post-mortem rest we’ve seen elsewhere in the Bible, which Paul’s teaching and scholarly writing is consistent with. “When Paul speaks of his desire ‘to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better,’ he isn’t suggesting that he is going to be ‘with Christ’ while less proficient Christians will have an interim waiting period.” “This is recognized in Eastern orthodoxy, which celebrates the saints in all sorts of ways but doesn’t imagine that they have already obtained final bliss. They won’t until we all do.”³⁷ Paul knows that after he departs, he will someday be with Christ and looks forward to that, but only when all the dead are raised.

Next up is Stephen, a man of the early church who was killed for his faith. Prior to being dragged out of the city to be stoned, he “looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’” “While they were stoning

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him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he fell on his knees and cried out, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them'" (Acts 7:55-56, 59-60). Because Stephen could see the current heaven and prayed for Jesus to receive his spirit, some feel that Stephen's spirit immediately went there after he died.³⁸ This is certainly understandable, but there's a problem. We are not told if or when his prayer was answered. Based on the Bible's description of him, it seems all but certain that Stephen is saved and will be on the New Earth (Acts 6:5, 6:15, 7:55). Therefore, I have no doubt that Jesus *will* answer his prayer. However, regarding the *when*, we know that the Bible's consistent teaching, including Jesus' own words, would place Stephen in Sheol immediately after he dies, and it seems unthinkable that Jesus would go back on his word just to receive Stephen's spirit immediately into the current heaven. Not that it would give us any reason to believe that other humans immediately go there if he were an exception to the rule anyway.

So what *do* we make of Stephen's words? First, it is entirely plausible that Stephen intended nothing else by them except to emulate Jesus as he was being crucified. After all, Stephen's words are very similar to those of Jesus just before he died (Luke 23:34, 46). He has plenty of access to those who were present at the crucifixion, so he is likely familiar with what Jesus said then. Stephen has just seen Jesus, he knows that he's being unjustly martyred like Jesus, and he is a devoted follower of Jesus, so is it any surprise that he would choose to imitate his savior's humble words while being killed? I would hope that I would be able to! Also, we need to remember that Stephen is *praying* here; he is *asking* Jesus for something. He is not demanding that Jesus receive his spirit immediately, nor is he trying to make a theological statement about where human spirits go immediately after dying. Like Paul, he has seen a glimpse of the current heaven, and like Paul, he desires to be with Christ. But as in the case of Paul, there is no reason within the text to assume that this happens immediately following death. No mention is made of where Stephen's spirit goes once he dies, and nowhere do we have confirmation that it is in the current heaven. We would have to assume that human spirits go immediately there after death before we could claim that Jesus'

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alleged affirmative and immediate answer to Stephen's prayer proves that they do. This, of course, is circular reasoning and faulty logic. In the end, as with Paul, we can only decisively conclude that both men really, really wanted to be with Jesus, but Jesus himself confirms that this won't ultimately occur until after he returns to take them—and the rest of those who are saved—to be with him in Heaven (John 14:2-3). Neither Paul nor Stephen left their physical life on earth to immediately join Jesus "at God's right hand"; rather, their leaving will occur from Sheol/Hades, "departing only after a final day of judgment."³⁹

This chapter's fourth and final example of those who seem to have gone to the current heaven upon dying is the departed duo of Elijah and Moses. Centuries after they physically lived, they came back to talk with Jesus on a very special occasion when he shows a few of his disciples a supernatural representation of himself (Matthew 17:1-4). But where did Elijah and Moses come from? Nothing in the text suggests that it's the current heaven, and if they were able to get there before Jesus' death and resurrection made the heavenly prerequisite of perfection possible, we've run into the same problem we had with Elijah and Enoch before, right? Let's also recall the fact that Jesus told us that no person but himself had been to the current heaven (John 3:13). Moreover, we have every reason to believe that they came from somewhere quite different, because we have another example of a prominent Old Testament figure who was transiently brought back from the afterlife, and we are told where he appeared from. The Israelite King Saul is not feeling so hot about a battle that he and his army are about to fight, so he consults a medium to ask advice from the spirit of Samuel, a deceased spiritual leader of Israel, very similar to Elijah and Moses. She does so and says to Saul, "I see a spirit coming up out of the ground.' 'What does he look like?' he asked. 'An old man wearing a robe is coming up,' she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. Samuel said to Saul, 'Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?' (1 Samuel 28:13-15) Cliffhanger! You'll just have to read the rest of the story to find out how it all goes down, but the point is that Samuel is doing exactly the opposite;

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he's "coming up out of the ground" from Sheol. Interestingly, scholars believe that the most likely root of the word *Sheol* means "to ask or enquire"—thus linking it with the story of the witch of Endor and the personal name 'Saul' (Hebrew: Sha'ul), with which it shares the identical consonantal root.⁴⁰ So the Bible's description of Samuel's first step into the hereafter is marinated in Sheol, with nary a dash of the current heaven even sprinkled on top! Besides, those who claim that Samuel was summoned from the current heaven must accept that the "highest heavens" inhabited by God and his angels are below us in the ground, a consequence that should not be—but is—often ignored (Psalm 68:32-33).⁴¹ And since Elijah, Moses, and Samuel were all godly spiritual leaders in Israel, it seems reasonable that their post-mortem experiences would be similar, doesn't it?

Likewise, God divulges that the blood of Abel, who was "commended as righteous" but murdered by his brother, "cries out to me from the ground"; Abel "still speaks, even though he is dead" (Hebrews 11:4, Genesis 4:8-10). Although these statements may be read figuratively, they may also be suggesting that Abel in the depths of Sheol—not just blood in the dirt—is crying out to God. The Bible is also clear that David, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), went somewhere else besides the current heaven when he died too (Acts 2:29-35). Indeed, the whole point of this passage is to demonstrate that David *isn't* in the current heaven, so that its readers know that verses 26-27 and 34-35—which refer to resurrection to the current heaven—apply to Jesus, not David (Acts 2:31-32)! And God confirms this same human existence between death and our eternal destinations with Daniel, another esteemed prophet among the Israelites, in a beautifully concise summary of exactly what we've come to conclude about what happens when we die. God explains it to Daniel, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt...as for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and *then at the end of the days* you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance" (Daniel 12:2,13). Those who will be saved "lie in death" in "rest" and "peace" until the last day (Isaiah 57:2, 26:19). "So man lies down and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, men will not awake or be roused from

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their sleep” (Job 14:12). Obviously Daniel and the rest of mankind sleep and rise as people, not just bodies. Bodies alone cannot rest, they cannot be awoken or aroused from the sleep of death by Jesus’ return, and they cannot “hear his voice and come out” (John 5:28-29). But people possessing both a body and a spirit can, and they do so to receive their allotted inheritance. Therefore, neither everlasting contempt in Hell nor everlasting life in the current heaven or eternal Heaven begins until such a resurrection occurs. “Clearly, then, the idea of a waiting place—or perhaps it should be called a process—that occupied the space between death and heaven had existed for hundreds of years in monotheistic religion.”⁴² This is the way God runs the biblical hereafter. Without exception, we all live, we all die, we all wait, we all rise, we all are judged, and lastly we all go to our final destination.

8

So it’s plain that we essentially all rise at the end for the purpose of humanity’s final judgment. But why does God wait until the last day to judge us and send us to our eternal fates? Why doesn’t he just send us right after death to Hell, Heaven, or a place where those without meaningful access to the gospel on earth hear it immediately before they’re jettisoned off to Hell or Heaven too? The answers to these questions are more curiosities than necessities in understanding God’s grand scheme for us, but they do allow us to tie up a few loose ends and provide a great overview for the next two chapters, so let’s look at them. There are at least two reasons for God to have one—and only one—day of judgment.

First, God’s judgment of human beings seems inseparably interwoven with several major one-time events, such as the destruction of the earth, the final doom of Satan and death, and the introduction of the New Earth. If the grand scheme of God necessitates the judgment of human beings at a specific time within these events, then the judgment of individual humans and their assignments to Hell or

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Heaven cannot occur before then.

Second, and much more significant, it seems clear that the final destinations of Hell and Heaven aren't even in place yet for people to go to! We already know that the Heaven that humans will go to is more technically a "new heaven and new earth" (2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1-5), a place God hadn't yet created in Isaiah's time. "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind" (Isaiah 65:17). There was no final destination for the saved at that time, and if God is "making everything new" at the time of the final judgment, where John gets a futuristic vision of Heaven in Revelation, it follows that the "new heaven and new earth" still aren't poised to be occupied currently. We've learned that Jesus, after returning to the current heaven, has been preparing a new perfect dwelling for his people, since this earth will be destroyed and pass away (Isaiah 24:19-20, 2 Peter 3:10-11). This may refer to the New Earth or the primary city on it, the New Jerusalem that "God has prepared" for those who live by faith (Hebrews 11:16), but this dwelling/city isn't inhabited when John sees it at the end of Revelation, nor will it descend from the new heaven to be inhabited until after Jesus' second coming (John 14:2-3, Revelation 3:12, 21:1-2). Surely if people went to the current heaven right after they died, they would be living in this city for John to see! Would God really keep the primary eternal dwelling of humans empty if he had plenty of them with him right now to occupy it, rather than stare at it? Of course not! Except for Jesus, there are no humans there right now, and part of the reason is that the final destination of Heaven, the "new heaven and new earth," is not fully ready for human habitation.

I realize that for some, the Bible's teaching that people don't go right to the current heaven when they die might take some getting used to, but perhaps what will convince you of this the most is asking why the Bible doesn't directly teach the opposite. Given how emotionally important our immediate postmortem fate is to us, let alone the significance it has on our ability to fulfill our purpose and achieve perfect community with God, don't you think he would have been able to find room in his words to simply say, "Everyone who is saved

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will go to heaven right after they die” if he wanted to? But he *never* says that at all! And he doesn’t because we don’t.

What about Gehenna, the final destination of Hell? Jesus warns us a lot about not going to this place, but the only time we are actually told of humans *present* in the eternal lake of fire is *after* judgment day (Revelation 20:11-15). And since God will “hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment”—not in Hell, but apparently in a place called Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4-9, Isaiah 24:19-22)—there really doesn’t seem to be a purpose for Gehenna to exist at all until after the last day, does there? Consistently, even *on* judgment day, Jesus confirms to humans who are about to go to Hell that it still has merely been “*prepared* for the devil and his angels,” not inhabited by them, and certainly not by humans yet either (Matthew 25:41-46). We know that God never intended for any humans to go to Hell, but clearly some will choose to join Satan and his demons there. Therefore, if Hell does exist right now, it’s empty, so why create it to just sit there long before it will even be inhabited?

So God chooses to wait until the last day to judge everyone at once, primarily because neither Heaven nor Hell are ready to be inhabited yet. Our physical bodies die, our spirits go to their place of waiting, and at the time of the final judgment of humanity, our spirits will be raised and joined with “imperishable,” “spiritual” bodies. Those who are saved will inhabit the flawless New Earth, clothed “with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (1 Corinthians 15:42-54, 2 Corinthians 5:4).

To me, the notion of a single judgment day for pretty much every human is sublimely simple. Every mention of final human judgment in the Bible, with the understandable exception of the martyrs of the first resurrection, fits nicely within this concept. However, for some folks this is a hard realization to accept. Why? Perhaps many of them are only familiar with or open to the notion that humans must go to Hell or the current heaven before this final judgment. If so, they are forced to fragment judgment day into several lesser judgments—at different times and involving different people—to account for all the examples they use of folks allegedly arriving in these places prior to the last day. As we sample these judgments, you’ll see

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how unnecessarily convoluted and confusing they get, but we need to compare them to the Bible, so bear with me. I'll keep it brief.

Some maintain that there is a judgment of faith for humans to determine their eternal destination right after they die, so that people are able to go right to the current heaven, although no biblical support is offered to substantiate this.⁴³ This also means that people can go right to Hell, but we know the Bible clearly teaches that there are no people in Gehenna until after the last day. Because a place is then needed for the unsaved after the judgment of faith, they say that Sheol is actually Hell, which we will find to be inaccurate in the next chapter. Moreover, multiple verses confirm that heroes of the Bible who are almost certainly saved went to Sheol (Genesis 37:35, 42:38, Psalm 89:48, Isaiah 38:10, Jonah 2:6). Despite this, they go on to argue that the day of final judgment is a judgment of works, not determining our eternal destination but rather our reward, based on what we did on earth. However, they either primarily or only include the unsaved in this judgment day, because it involves the dead in Sheol. Disregarding that the saved are also there and not in the current heaven, they teach that “Christians will not be judged at the end of this life in the same way that non-Christians will be” and add a totally separate judgment of works for the saved.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵ However, it is unequivocal that both the saved and unsaved are all judged on the same day in the same way (Matthew 12:35-37, John 5:28-29, Revelation 11:16-18, Malachi 3:16-18, Romans 14:10-12, 2 Corinthians 5:10). It is not surprising then that “opinions vary about when the judgment of works for believers will occur”—with at least four different times posited⁴⁶—as there is no evidence in the Bible to confirm that multiple judgments of works exist at all.

And if the day of final judgment is only a judgment of works, then why are people's final destinations clearly being determined then (Revelation 20:12-15)? Why are people being separated into those going to Hell and those going to Heaven (Matthew 12:35-37, 25:31-46)? And what's the point in judging the works of the unsaved anyway? The Bible does not definitively confirm varying degrees of punishment in Hell, and only a footnote in Matthew 23:14 and Luke 12:46-48 suggest this possibility. In any case, there's no biblical

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reason to suspect a wide variety of experiences in Hell, so why hold such a spectacular judgment of works just for people going there? Are mostly hellish and really hellish experiences significantly different? Finally, why are people's works only being judged *then*? If it was so important for God to distinguish two entirely separate judgments of works from a judgment of faith to begin with, then why does he wait until humans have been in Hell and the current heaven for who knows how many millennia before he determines the extent of their punishment or reward? Is God really going to say, "Ted, I appreciated how you helped that old lady across the street right before that car hit you and sent you here. To reward you, I'm gonna add a pool onto the back of your mansion...in about 4,000 years. That's when the judgment of works goes down." God's words make sense. This doesn't.

The numerous problems above could all be easily avoided by abandoning the belief of immediate entry into Hell or the current heaven after death in favor of the Bible's single judgment day of both faith and works. Indeed, there is a plethora of verses depicting rewards for the saved in Heaven. There are also several passages describing a time when we will give an account of our lives to God and be judged according to our deeds (Matthew 12:36, Romans 14:10-12, 1 Corinthians 3:13-14, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 11:16-18), but this all logically occurs at the same time we are assigned to our eternal destinations (Matthew 25:31-46, John 5:28-29, Revelation 20:12-15). Both faith and works are playing essential roles in the judgment taking place in these latter three passages, and in Booklets 4 and 5 we'll see why faith and works ultimately cannot be judged separately. When we let the Bible just say what it says, God makes sense. He knew it would be better and more sensible to hold only one day of judgment in the future, and so he does.

So we made it all the way to judgment day, but only by sidestepping this mysterious place the Bible and I keep telling you about between our physical death and our resurrection. It's true; I've been teasing you long enough. Bad radiologist. So what is the business on this place where the spirits of the dead wait until the last day, when they are raised? To remind you of something that will be very useful to you while reading the impending answer, and to sadistically keep you in suspense for just a few more lines, keep in mind that what is new and strange at first does not mean that it's incorrect. We're going to travel through some pretty weird places and entertain some pretty foreign ideas. But they're all biblical, and they're only potentially strange because you might not have considered them before. After studying in great depth where the Bible says we go upon dying and after synthesizing a comprehensive conclusion, I believe that the most likely answer to be true is simple, includes all the postmortem places the Bible discusses, incorporates both Old and New Testament conceptions, fits well within God's plan of salvation, and enables us to satisfactorily answer the tough questions that we have been and will be addressing—questions that are exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to resolve otherwise. I don't know that this answer is right, but it is straightforward, sensible, and Scriptural—a solution I think you'll find understandably acceptable after undergoing acclimatization.

So where do humans go right after they die? The quick answer is Sheol or Hades, as I'm sure you've figured out by now. The long answer is a guided tour through Sheol/Hades. And I won't charge you a dime, ask for a tip, or even direct you to the gift shop when we return! Our journey to biblically understand this place unsurprisingly starts in the Old Testament. We've repeatedly witnessed how the ancient Hebrews wrote about Sheol—the realm of the dead—a place where *everybody* went after dying. “Who can live and not see death, or who can escape the power of Sheol” (Psalm 89:48)? Some felt that existence ended there without hope for both the righteous and the

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unrighteous, while others believed that something more followed (Psalm 6:5, Isaiah 38:18, 1 Samuel 2:6, Job 14:13-17, 19:26, Psalm 21:1-4, 49:15, 71:20, 133:3). We'll demonstrate in Booklet 6 why this uncertainty regarding the afterlife for these Old Testament writers was not only understandable but also expected without the context of Jesus' accomplishments. For now it is only important to understand that these folks are unanimous in their confirmation of Sheol and that everyone goes there—at least temporarily. Well, guess how Sheol was translated when the Hebrew Old Testament was rendered into Greek? Guess how it was translated in the Greek writings of Josephus and Philo—a Jewish historian and philosopher respectively—who both wrote around the time of Jesus? It's translated as Hades! Hades is a Greek New Testament term, and although it became more well-defined over time, as Sheol did to the Jews, the Greeks always considered it “where the dead go,” “both the virtuous and the sinners.”⁴⁷⁻⁴⁸ Everybody goes to Sheol/Hades when they kick the bucket, which is why they are used synonymously by scholars, in the Bible, and in this book.⁴⁹ Jesus himself tells us that “the dead bury their own dead” (Matthew 8:22). “The realm of the dead below is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you—all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones—all those who were kings over the nations. They will all respond, they will say to you, ‘You also have become weak, as we are; you have become like us’” (Isaiah 14:9-10).

Because some are reluctant to accept that people don't go to the current heaven right after dying, they consider Sheol/Hades to be Hell, teach that only the wicked are there, and otherwise ignore its role in the hereafter.⁵⁰⁻⁵¹ But “‘hell’ is not a good translation of *hades*,” which “is never employed in connection with the final state of punishment.”⁵²⁻⁵³ As we've already clearly demonstrated, as the Bible teaches, and as the ancient Jews (and Greeks) maintained, Sheol includes the saved as well as the unsaved (Genesis 37:35, 42:38, Isaiah 38:10, Jonah 2:6). Aside from our physical existence here, “Jews believed there were two other worlds—one above and unobtainable, heaven,... and one below and inevitable, subterranean sheol,” “to which were consigned all the dead, regardless of the merits or faults of their

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earthly lives. There was no suggestion that virtuous mortals might aspire to take the ‘up-lift’ to the heavens when they died.”⁵⁴ Both those who will inherit “everlasting life” and those who will endure “everlasting contempt” “sleep in the dust of the earth” (Daniel 12:2). We’ll learn soon that even Jesus went to Sheol/Hades after his crucifixion; he has not “descended into Hell.”⁵⁵ God’s presence is not in Hell, so Jesus doesn’t go to Hell, because Hades is not Hell, especially since it gets thrown *into* Hell on judgment day (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10, Revelation 20:14). Rather, it is the first stop following *every* human’s death, even Jesus’. When Death is personified, “Hades is following close behind him,” and now we know why (Revelation 6:8). Half of the times that Hades is brought up in the Bible, death is mentioned right alongside it, because every human’s death and a trip to Hades are inseparably linked.

As the ancient Greek/Roman understanding of Hades matured, it was believed that once people made their way through the underworld, they would ultimately find themselves in one of three places. These “realms of Hades are divided by ethical categories.”⁵⁶ The righteous would go to Elysium or the Elysian Fields, a type of paradise with “green pastures and brighter light.”⁵⁷⁻⁵⁸ The morally neutral would go to the Fields of Asphodel, a spiritually neutral place not primarily meant for reward or punishment. The impious “villains” and “great sinners” would go to Tartarus, an abyss-like dungeon of torment.⁵⁹ “Tartarus yawns twice as far down as Olympus is high.”⁶⁰ The biblical concept of Sheol/Hades is similar, both predating and postdating the Greek concept. The Bible even names Tartarus as the place where demons are generally “held for judgment.” But they aren’t the only ones there; their fate is paralleled with that of others. The same passage describes unrighteous humans who are held “for punishment on the day of judgment,” and both these demons and these humans are kept in darkness here (2 Peter 2:4, 9, 17, Isaiah 24:21-22, Jude 1:5-7). No wonder a legion of demons that Jesus drove out of a man “begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss,” so that they could avoid “torture” (Luke 8:27-31)! We read in Revelation that the Abyss also contains the beast, and for a time even Satan himself (11:7, 20:1-3), before both of them are eternally

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condemned (20:10). Obviously, Tartarus/the Abyss is no place for demons to torture humans, nor is it a purgatory for either demons or humans; it's a place of punishment and waiting for *all* who will go to Hell—a pre-Hell if that's simpler. So we see that Sheol/Hades actually plays a significant role in the New Testament concept of the afterlife, at least in the case of Tartarus.

What about Elysium? In the New Testament we find the word paradise, the Greek word *paradeisos*, three times. This is a generic term and simply indicates various places lovely enough to be considered a paradise, typically applied in the ancient world to a Persian or Greek “pleasure garden.” “The wealthy had a paradise on earth in the back gardens of their estates.”⁶¹ We know that Elysium is a paradise also, but how do we know that it is similar to the kinds of *paradeisos* in the Bible? Let's start by checking out what types of places *paradeisos* can be. After consulting *A Greek-English Lexicon*, *Strong's Greek Lexicon*, and *greekbible.com*, our available definitions are “grand enclosure or preserve, garden or pleasure ground like Eden, park, the part of Hades which was thought by the later Jews to be the abode of the souls of the pious until the resurrection, heaven or the upper regions of the heavens,” and a random oddball definition, “a stupid fellow.”⁶²⁻⁶⁴ In addition to that last one, we are given a surprise, aren't we? One of the perfectly acceptable definitions for *paradeisos* is something remarkably similar to Elysium! Let's look at the three times *paradeisos* is used to decide where the biblical context might favor this definition. As we've seen in Chapter 6, Paul equates one “paradise” with “the third heaven” in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, so it's clear that *paradeisos* here means the current heaven. In Revelation 2:7 the tree of life that started out on this earth in the garden of Eden and ends up on the New Earth is currently located “in the paradise of God” (Genesis 2:8-9, Revelation 22:1-2). We don't know exactly which paradise this refers to, but as both the other locations of this tree are terrestrial rather than heavenly—which would be expected for a tree—it seems most likely that the “paradise of God” housing it is also an earthly place like Sheol/Hades. This is supported by the fact that *paradeisos* typically carried with it a terrestrial—not ethereal—connotation, evident in both its ancient applications and available definitions.

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And the context surrounding the final use of *paradeisos* even more strongly suggests against a reference to the current heaven, although it involves one of the people most frequently used to argue that we go there right after we die: the repentant criminal being crucified next to Jesus.

As Jesus and two convicts hang on their crosses, one is insulting Jesus. The other starts to as well, but then realizes that he's wrong and gives the first a good scolding, claiming that Jesus was blameless. Upon asking Jesus to remember him, Jesus says, "today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:39-43). It has been well established that the Bible consistently confirms its rule of thumb that no humans—except Jesus and the martyrs of the first resurrection—end up in the current heaven until the dead are all raised together on judgment day. Therefore, the *paradeisos* the convict is headed for is not likely to be the current heaven. Jesus and this criminal would be together elsewhere after they died, but where? Ephesians 4:9-10 tells us that Jesus descended into the "lower, earthly regions" or "depths of the earth" before his ascension into the current heaven, and Jesus himself verifies that this occurred immediately following his death. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the *heart* of the earth" (Matthew 12:40), a clearly subterranean place, not simply in a tomb situated on the surface of said earth. But this comparison is even more important for another reason. Jesus didn't get submerged alive underwater on Easter weekend, so why does he parallel his death experience to Jonah? Because when Jonah was thrown into the sea, he most likely *also* died (Jonah 1:1-2:10 gives the whole story). Although it's not often taught that way in Sunday school, the text leaves little doubt. Jonah confirms, "I called to the Lord...from the depths of Sheol. . . . The *earth* barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit" (Jonah 2:2,6). Sheol is the abode of the *dead*, not the nearly drowned. The mostly dead go to Miracle Max's, because Sheol won't take you unless you're totally dead. And I'm neither bluffing nor blaving!¹⁶⁵ Although we see in Revelation 20:13 that the sea may also be the abode of the dead in a similar way that Sheol is, Sheol is considered a subterranean place.

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Jonah's claim that "the earth barred" him in forever—not the sea—conveys that he did actually die, and his spirit went to Sheol where it "called to the Lord." When he was brought "up from the pit," God wasn't just pulling him out of deep waters, he was resurrecting him from Sheol, which is repeatedly translated as "pit" in the Old Testament! This is precisely why Jesus directly compares his own death, trip to Sheol ("the heart of the earth"), and resurrection to Jonah's; it wouldn't make sense for him to do so otherwise! Jonah died, went to Sheol, and then was resurrected (Jonah 2:1-6). Jesus died, went to Sheol, and then was resurrected. Jesus commits his spirit into his Father's hands with the knowledge that they will eventually be reunited, but clearly, it is not until Jesus' resurrection and ascension that this reunion in the current heaven takes place (Luke 23:46, Ephesians 1:19-20, Mark 16:19). *Every second* of Jesus' time between his death and resurrection was spent in Sheol/Hades!

Why, you ask? Because that's where *all* humans go between their death and resurrection! If the human being Jesus was truly taking our fate upon himself in death and if there was a place of waiting for all human beings between death and resurrection, Sheol/Hades is precisely the location where we would expect him to go, right? The repentant criminal is a human who is about to die and go to his place of waiting, and Jesus wouldn't contradict himself in John 6:40 to give this man exclusive early access to the current heaven when every other human being has to wait until judgment day. Therefore, given the criminal's positive response to Jesus, the assurance that he'll be with Jesus later that day, and Jesus' own mission and humanity, the paradise that Jesus promises him is most likely "the part of Hades which was thought by the later Jews to be the abode of the souls of the pious until the resurrection," isn't it? And Jesus would clearly qualify for this Paradise himself, so they would be there together. Obviously, Jesus can visit Paradise whenever he wants, so this account of his appearance there may also explain how Paul could "depart and be with Christ" after dying without being in the current heaven (Philippians 1:22-23). It is possible that Jesus visits Paradise to welcome all of the saved when they arrive, but it is certain—as it was with the fortunate felon—that Jesus does not stay to reside with us

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there or anywhere until after his second coming (John 14:3). Between his ascension and judgment day, his primary residence is the current heaven; ours is not (Mark 16:19, 14:61-62, Psalm 115:16).

This should not be surprising when we consider Jesus' word choices. He is very comfortable using the term "heaven" numerous times throughout his teachings; however, there is only one time he uses the term "paradise," and there is only one time he specifies a saved person's immediate postmortem destination. They are one and the same. Jesus never tells people who will be saved that they will enter the current heaven upon dying, but he does tell them that they will go to Paradise. Given what an emotionally significant concept going to the current heaven right after death is to so many of us, don't you think Jesus would have just used "heaven" instead of "paradise" to validate it? It would have been easy and conclusive, and he would have even saved ink! But he doesn't. Instead, he uncharacteristically avoids the term "heaven" to uniquely specify that Paradise is the first destination for the saved after dying. Scholarly assessment of Jesus' words to the criminal agrees. "Despite a long tradition of misreading, paradise is *here*, as in some other Jewish writing, not a final destination but the blissful garden, the parkland of rest and tranquility, where the dead are refreshed as they await the dawn of a new day."⁶⁶ So again, Sheol/Hades finds its way into the New Testament afterlife, this time with the Elysium-like Paradise—a pre-Heaven if that's simpler. If people like the criminal, Elijah, Moses, Samuel, Abel, David, and Daniel rest until judgment day in Paradise when they die, then no wonder Samuel is disturbed when he is brought *up* at the request of Saul, who gave him all kinds of headaches in life, who is asking him for advice on a battle doomed to failure, and who rarely listened to Samuel before anyway! As the non-plussed prophet was "called reluctantly from slumber in Sheol,"⁶⁷ you can almost hear him murmur, "So yeah Saul, could you make this quick? I was kind of in Paradise before you rang."

Thus far, the realm of the dead includes the pre-Hell of Tartarus and the pre-Heaven of Paradise. Our tour of Sheol/Hades has turned out to be a tour of the Bible, hasn't it? Jesus himself confirms how well the Old and New Testament concepts of the afterlife complement

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each other in the account of *The Rich Man and Lazarus* (Luke 16:19-31). “The time came when Lazarus died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side” (Luke 16:22-23). Some try to read this story figuratively, but doing so makes it nearly impossible to know what we are supposed to take away from it.⁶⁸ In contrast, the evidence in the text actually favors these men being real people known to Jesus, rather than the generic, anonymous characters he employs in his figurative parables. This story is never labeled in the Bible as a parable, *not once* does Jesus name characters in his parables, there would be no reason to name the beggar in this story if he weren’t a real person, and Abraham is definitely a real person. Jesus also includes several descriptive details that are completely unnecessary unless he is literally describing what the immediate postmortem afterlife is like, and because he’s God, he would certainly know. His ministry had long been underway in many different places, and there’s no doubt that he had met many rich men and beggars. These clues most likely indicate that two of them were the rich man and Lazarus in this story. Although we can’t confirm it, apparently these two had encountered Jesus, their lives demonstrated opposite responses to him, and then they died and went to somewhat different destinations.

The rich man went to a place of torment in Hades. This is exactly what we would expect, because earlier in Luke, Jesus had already confirmed that his contemporaries who had been exposed to his words and deeds but then rejected them would go to Hades (Luke 10:8-15). But not just anywhere in Hades. Peter, who was obviously familiar with Jesus’ perspective on the afterlife, implies more specifically that those who have “known the way of righteousness” but chose to “turn their backs” on it would go to Tartarus, a place “to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:4-22). Just like them, the rich man is being punished in Hades without hope of escape (Luke 16:22-26). But he’s not in Hell because the Bible is clear that Gehenna, not Tartarus of Hades, is the forever Hell, the lake of fire into which the non-eternal Hades—and therefore Tartarus—is eventually cast (Revelation 20:14). As such, neither Hades nor

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Tartarus can be equated with Hell in the Bible. So if the rich man is trapped in torment in Hades, and Hades can't be Hell, then where is the only place he could be? Tartarus, of course.

What about Lazarus? Well, when he died, he went to Abraham's side. The Bible is clear that Abraham is saved (Galatians 3:6-9), but we know it's also clear that he's not in the current heaven. After all, if he were, wouldn't we expect him and Lazarus to be at *God's* side, rather than Lazarus going to Abraham's side? God is absent from this story because the current heaven is absent from this story. "Abraham died...and was gathered to his people. But not, as far as the Bible indicates, to God. For the authors of the Torah, heaven was the home of God and his angels, but it was not the dwelling of humans or anything resembling humans."⁶⁹ So where are Lazarus and Abraham? Paradise of course, a place sensibly referred to as Abraham's Bosom, which is "in the New Testament and in Jewish writings a term signifying the abode of bliss in the other world."⁷⁰ "It is plain that Abraham is here viewed as the warden of paradise."⁷¹ As with Jesus and the convict, Lazarus and Abraham arrived in a postmortem Paradise, "a state in which the dead are held firmly within the conscious love of God." While some desire to call this state heaven, "we must note once more how interesting it is that the New Testament routinely doesn't call it that and uses the word heaven in other ways."⁷²

This explains why the rich man and Lazarus can see each other. They're both in Sheol/Hades! Those who insist that Hades is really Hell and that Paradise is really the current heaven, simply because they believe that people should go to these places right after they die, are trapped by this story. "The problem with a strictly literal interpretation of this passage is that it presses too far, suggesting that...people in Heaven and Hell talk to each other. The problem with a strictly figurative interpretation is that it makes it difficult to know what, if anything, to take seriously."⁷³ But if we can open-mindedly accept that the Bible doesn't teach that people go to either place right after dying, then there are no problems. This story can be interpreted exactly as it's stated. Unlike in Hell and Heaven, people in Sheol/Hades can see each other just fine. But the rich man seems to be in a much

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different part of Sheol/Hades, a place of torment that sounds just like Tartarus. Both men have just died, both are in relative proximity to each other, but the rich man is “in torment” and “in agony” in Tartarus while Lazarus is being “comforted” in Paradise (Luke 16:25).

I want to pause to recognize that it might be a bit strange for you to consider subterranean abodes for the dead, but is it really any more strange than considering places like Hell or Heaven? And remember that Sheol/Hades is a completely spiritual realm, not a physical one. No one’s going to discover a giant cave of departed ghosts by digging down far enough! If it’s more helpful, think of Tartarus and Paradise for *what* they are—a pre-Hell and pre-Heaven—rather than *where* they are. Their purpose is more important than their position.

People are in the pre-Hell of Tartarus or the pre-Heaven of Paradise because that’s where their free will led them, just as with Hell or Heaven. They had meaningful access to God’s solution for them and then chose to reject it or accept it. No one can go from one place to the other. “Between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us” (Luke 16:26). A person would be in Tartarus or Paradise for the same reasons she would be in Hell or Heaven, and once in Tartarus or Paradise, that’s where she remains until the day of judgment. Therefore, everyone in Tartarus ends up in Hell, and everyone in Paradise ends up in Heaven. This is why we find Jesus presumably comparing the saved in the eternal Heaven with the unsaved in the non-eternal Tartarus of Hades (Matthew 11:23-24, Luke 10:15). After all, those we find in Tartarus in 2 Peter 2:4 are “kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great day” (Jude 1:6). If they’re not in Gehenna yet, but their chains are everlasting, there doesn’t seem to be any other outlet for the inhabitants of Tartarus except Hell, right? Tartarus is not a purgatorial correctional facility. And the inevitable progression of Tartarus to Hell or Paradise to Heaven makes perfect sense. If God’s purpose for humans necessitates granting them the free will to choose their ultimate destination, that choice would logically result in a similar penultimate destination while they wait to be raised on judgment day. Tartarus in Hades isn’t Gehenna, but it’s still a place of

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“torment” and “agony,” and everyone who goes there only progresses to Hell. Paradise in Hades isn’t the current heaven or the New Earth, but it’s still a place of “comfort,” “rest,” and “peace,” and everyone who goes there only progresses to Heaven (Luke 16:25, Isaiah 57:2).

This is likely why we hear a lot more about Hell and Heaven than Tartarus and Paradise in the Bible. If humanity’s final destination is either Hell—and it really is that bad—or Heaven—and it really is that good—and that destination is permanently decided before people arrive in Tartarus or Paradise, then what would be the best way for God to motivate us to choose the better final destination? It certainly *wouldn’t* be to elaborate on the vices of going to the not-quite-as-bad-as-Hell Tartarus or on the virtues of going to the not-quite-as-good-as Heaven Paradise, right? It would be to minimize the focus on these places of waiting and preferentially educate us about Hell and Heaven instead, treating pre-Hell and pre-Heaven as places practically synonymous with their eternal counterparts! This is exactly what God does in the Bible, because in the end, knowing about and going to Hell or Heaven are infinitely more important than expounding on the lesser locales of the afterlife. The Bible confirms and explains enough about Tartarus and Paradise as it is. We can discern who goes there, what their fate is, and what these places are generally like. No further education would change our ultimate choice between Hell and Heaven anyway. We don’t know for sure, but it seems the other free-willed spirits God created—at least the demons—are subject to this after-life sequence as well, although we know almost nothing about God’s solution for them or their salvation process, if there is one. It would seem consistent for God to provide a savior for them as well, but since we don’t need to know, God doesn’t tell us. Don’t worry though; apparently the angels don’t understand everything about our salvation process either (1 Peter 1:12)! Regardless, whoever is there, clearly the concepts of Sheol/Hades and Hell/Heaven seem to be meant for each other, as if God were telling one story of the hereafter all along from the Old Testament to the New! Well of course he is.

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We have now explored most of Sheol/Hades, but there is still one missing piece to the puzzle. Is there any biblical reference to a place like the Fields of Asphodel, as there is to Tartarus/the Abyss and Elysium/Paradise? Is there a connection to discover between this aspect of Sheol/Hades and the Christian afterlife? I should emphasize that we are not seeking for such a connection because God's hereafter has to conform to the Jewish, Greek, or Roman understanding of Sheol/Hades and its realms. However, since the biblical authors mentioned such places by name, they were obviously attempting to explain the afterlife in terms that their Jewish, Greek, and Roman audiences could easily understand. So if it helps, focus on the reasons these places exist. Understand the concepts—like pre-Hell and pre-Heaven—to which the Bible and/or we are attaching names and locations. For example, if folks knew about the Fields of Asphodel, is there a correlative biblical place that would make difficult issues concerning God's hereafter much easier to understand?

Yes, the Bible does offer us some evidence to ponder. We've seen that Tartarus is for the rebellious and that Paradise is for the righteous. Are there human spirits who don't fit into either of these categories, for which a third section of Sheol/Hades would be necessary? You bet your bippy! What about all the folks we discussed at length who don't have meaningful access to the gospel, those who died before Jesus came, those who can't get adequate education about Jesus while alive, or those too young or mentally unable to comprehend God's solution for them? They neither have the information needed to accept righteousness through Jesus, nor do they know the gospel in a way that they could willfully rebel against. As much as any human can be, they are spiritually neutral toward the gospel, not candidates for either Tartarus or Paradise. But they *are* perfectly fit for a similarly neutral Asphodelian corner of Sheol/Hades, aren't they? Such a location is not given a specific name in the Bible, but we do know that a residence for such people between death and judgment

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exists. Given that much of my training involved the pervasive use of mnemonics, I'll call this place L.U.G.G (or just Lugg): Limbo Until Getting the Gospel. If it's too much for you to use the word Lugg, just replace it with limbo instead. But we can try to punctuate the heaviness of this subject matter with at least a little fun, right? Keep in mind that I do not claim my propositions about Lugg below to be definitively correct; I simply hope to demonstrate how they bring together the biblical hereafter in the most sensible way.

1 Peter 3:18-20 describes a place where spirits are in prison who lived and died before Jesus' time. Clearly they did not have access to the gospel while alive, so after his resurrection, Jesus goes there to preach to them! There's no reason for Jesus to preach to people in Paradise, as they've already heard and believed his message. But this passage wouldn't be referring to people in Tartarus either, as there's no point in preaching the gospel to those who will inevitably go to Hell, not to mention that anyone in Tartarus would have already had meaningful access to the gospel while alive anyway. And why would God send people to such a place of agony and torment just because they haven't heard the gospel? But the most important evidence that Jesus went somewhere other than Tartarus or Paradise to initially preach to the dead is that God's solution hadn't been available to almost all of these people to reject or accept during life! When Jesus first went to preach to the dead, the only humans in Tartarus would have been the ones who were alive to hear and reject Jesus but died before he was resurrected. Our discussion in the last chapter about the rich man would lead us to consider him one of these relatively few individuals. Likewise, the only humans in Paradise would have been the ones who were alive to hear and accept Jesus but died before he was resurrected, like the crucified criminal. Therefore, the vast majority of deceased human spirits at this time would be in the place described by 1 Peter 3:18-20, which makes sense because only *they* could benefit from Jesus' preaching anyway.* And if Jesus considers it so important to preach to these folks who didn't have meaningful access to the gospel during life, then there is every reason to believe

* Interestingly, it has been argued that Jesus is preaching to demons rather than humans in this passage, so we evaluate the validity of this claim here.⁷⁴

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he would return to do the same for all future folks without such exposure to the gospel during life. Could this passage be referring to Lugg then? Of course!

As Peter himself continues to elaborate, “The gospel was preached even to those *who are now dead*, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit” (1 Peter 4:6). How else could God use Jesus to show mercy to the Jews’ dead ancestors, as he does in Luke 1:67-72? And concerning people who *do* have meaningful access to the gospel, how else could it “have been better for them *not* to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them” (2 Peter 2:20-21), without an alternative to Tartarus and Hell where people could go who couldn’t know the gospel while alive? Paul appears to allude to Lugg as well. He tells us that before Jesus’ resurrection, God “overlooked” people’s ignorant idol worship, “but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed” (Acts 17:16, 29-30). This overlooking of God’s does not mean that all idolators before Jesus’ time are automatically saved, because the whole world is judged according to repentance associated with the message of Jesus, the man God has appointed, and these folks are still subject to that judgment. Not to mention that overlooking the sins of some people before Jesus’ time and condemning other people for the same sins after Jesus’ time isn’t exactly judging the world with justice. However, since God overlooked these idolators’ sins, they obviously aren’t automatically damned either. So what is the only way that he could have overlooked their sins yet still judged them with justice via the gospel? Lugg, a place where the eternal destiny of these deceased would be overlooked until their ignorance was able to be informed by Jesus preaching to them, allowing them to be judged according to the same criterion as everyone who had meaningful access to the gospel during life.

Even Jesus himself seems to emphasize Lugg. “A time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in

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himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:25-29). Clearly, the time Jesus said “has now come” cannot be the same as the time “when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out,” as the latter has not yet occurred. Because Jesus was about to provide his solution to sin through his death and resurrection, he refers to a *first* time that had now come for him to go to the dead, so that those who wanted to hear his message—but hadn’t been able to yet—would eventually rise to live! Obviously, this talk of resurrection must have surprised some Jews, who studied the Old Testament and therefore weren’t used to such certainty regarding the dead being raised. Jesus calms them down, only to tell them of a *second* time that’s coming, one that had apparently *not* come yet, when *all* the dead will rise for final judgment. So the first time *already* came with Jesus, allowing the dead to hear his message so that they could obtain life, although there’s no mention of them coming out of their graves yet. That sounds an awful lot like the Lugg suggested in 1 Peter 3:18-20 and 4:6, doesn’t it? The second time *is coming*, when all the dead do rise to finally experience that life or to be condemned. That sounds an awful lot like judgment day, where we are *all* (besides the martyrs of the first resurrection) resurrected together, doesn’t it? Just like we’ve been saying all along! Apparently, Luke, Peter, Paul, and Jesus all teach the concept of Lugg.

But if all of these passages do refer to Lugg, then why are the inhabitants that Peter tells us about in prison if they’re spiritually neutral, and why are they in Lugg if they’re disobedient? The questions kind of answer each other. People who would go to Lugg are neutral in regard to salvation—in their ability to respond to God’s solution for them—because they didn’t have meaningful access to the gospel to make a decision about it either way while alive. But that doesn’t mean that they are *morally* neutral, never having done anything right or wrong. Remember the specific inhabitants of Lugg

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who 1 Peter 3:18-20 is telling us about: people before Jesus' time who disobeyed but who have the potential to respond to Jesus' message given exposure. We don't exactly know how these folks disobeyed, but the idolatry "overlooked" in Acts 17:29-30 is a violation of two of the Ten Commandments! Also, Jesus identifies people in Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom as folks who "would have repented long ago," if Jesus had performed the same miracles for them that were rejected by his contemporaries (Matthew 11:21-24). Does this mean they're damned just because they were born before Jesus was? No, Lugg allows us to explain how God restores at least some of them "to what they were before" their deaths, people who still had a choice to follow him or not, except now with the knowledge of Jesus' message (Ezekiel 16:53-55). However, they were still extremely disobedient to God while on earth (Genesis 19:1-9, Joel 3:4-7). They didn't have access to the gospel, which is why Jesus comes to preach to such people after they die, but they did do some seriously bad stuff! It's not really surprising then that we find them in prison in Lugg, is it? This would make some sense of Jesus' otherwise perplexing assertion that a person who does not know God's will but "does things deserving punishment" is still punished "with few blows," even though his judgment is clearly different and less severe than that of the "unbelievers" who do know but reject God's will (Luke 12:42-48). A similar punishment in Lugg may therefore occur for modern folks outside the gospel's reach who have similarly low moral standards.

Then perhaps the less immoral spiritually neutral inhabitants of Lugg—such as the spirit of an adult with severe lifelong cerebral palsy—are not in prison and may be experiencing a more positive side of Lugg. This sort of limbo, particularly for children, was espoused by Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, theologian Peter Abelard, and Thomas Aquinas.⁷⁹ It would make sense for a just God to use Lugg as a way to even out lesser inequalities from people's earthly lives, as he does their unequal access to the gospel. Very importantly, this would also allow us a plausible way to understand God's perspective when he decides to end the physical lives of various Old Testament individuals. None of them would have had meaningful access to the gospel, and essentially all of them were exposed to horrific suffering throughout

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their lives due to the immorality of their cultures—including children and likely others who were not contributing to such immorality (e.g. Genesis 19:1-9, Deuteronomy 12:29-31, 2 Kings 17:31, Amos 1:13). In the biblical hereafter, physical death would simply be a continuation of their pre-Hell/Heaven existence, rather than the termination of it. Therefore, combining his unique authority over their lives as their Creator with his unique knowledge of their bleak earthly predicament, God could have actually used physical death to shorten their suffering here and replace it with a far more positive compensatory experience in Lugg. Likewise, he could easily use varying levels of agony and torment in Tartarus or rest and comfort in Paradise to achieve similar overall fairness for people in those places as well. In fact, at least in the case of those who go to Paradise, God *confirms* that he does this! “The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart; the devout are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death” (Isaiah 57:1-2). It makes sense then that God would even out in Lugg the varying earthly experiences of those who *might* go to Paradise as well, but at any rate, at least their exposure to Jesus’ message would ultimately be a fair one. Everyone in Lugg will learn and understand God’s solution for them.

This does not mean that the people there will all accept the gospel when he preaches it to them. Lugg is not some sort of purgatory, as if imprisonment there would necessarily result in an inhabitant’s salvation. The only thing that will save those in Lugg is the faith that accepts the gospel, and many will not exhibit that, setting them on the path to Tartarus that inevitably leads to Gehenna. You might think that folks in Lugg would have an unfair advantage over us upon hearing Jesus’ message because they at least would be absolutely certain that there is life after death. However, if you consider who goes there, confirmation of an afterlife would not in any way increase their likelihood of accepting God’s message of salvation through Jesus. The people in Lugg are those who died too young to understand the gospel, those who were too mentally incapacitated to understand the gospel, and those who were chronologically or geographically isolated

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from the gospel. The first two groups wouldn't have been able to contemplate the hereafter while on earth well enough for the after-life to unfairly confirm the truth of anything Jesus said or did. For them, Lugg would practically *be* their entire meaningful exposure to the concepts of God, sin, Jesus, redemption, Hell, and Heaven. As far as knowledge of the gospel is concerned, they would be starting with much the same blank slate in Lugg as we start with when we're born here. And the third group would actually have a strike *against* them in Lugg, because they *would* have preconceptions about the hereafter from their earthly lives, but *none of them* would have anything to do with Jesus, as they had no meaningful access to the gospel here. Instead of starting with a blank slate, like the other inhabitants of Lugg or you and me, they would have beliefs to *unlearn* before they would be willing to accept Jesus' message. God's solution of Jesus would be a brand new concept to everyone in Lugg, not a second-chance confirmation of an option they knew about but rejected while on earth. Therefore, the variety of responses to the gospel in Lugg would likely be very similar to that which we experience here.

After all, God has to maintain his justice in Lugg too. He will give folks there whatever equivalent exposure to the gospel that he gives us here, so there's no reason to think that anyone gets an unfair advantage, either in Lugg or on earth. Once that equal opportunity has been offered to a person in Lugg, it follows that their genuine response would result in a transfer to either Tartarus or Paradise, depending what choice is made. We have no biblical evidence of a fixed, non-crossable chasm between Lugg and Tartarus or Lugg and Paradise, only between Tartarus and Paradise.

So Lugg would be a relatively transient place once people hear God's solution for them there. True, people who lived before Jesus' time would have been waiting in Lugg from very early on, but only because there was no gospel to give them yet! They obviously couldn't get it before Jesus accomplished it, but as soon as he had a message to preach to them, he did, right? So Lugg is not a place where lucky individuals get hundreds of years to ponder and believe in Jesus' message or not. God does not show favoritism in the time or type of exposure to the gospel that people get (Romans 2:11, 1 Peter 2:23).

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Whatever way people learn of God's solution for them, it will be communicated evenly across the playing field; you can be assured of that. Even though God can reach people in all kinds of ways, the Bible shows us some examples of how he covers all his bases (Colossians 1:22-23). For people who are "near" the gospel with meaningful access to it on earth and who die well before judgment day, he does it via that exposure (Romans 10:8-10). For people living shortly before judgment day, who will have an abbreviated window of time for access to the gospel whether on earth or in Lugg, he adds a worldwide public announcement (Revelation 14:6-7)! And for those people who never have meaningful access to the gospel on earth, he seems to provide it in 1 Peter 3:18-20 via Lugg. There is undeniably a group of people who didn't have access to Jesus' message when they were alive but who are exposed to it after they die. They can't really plug into a Tartarus, where humans go who have heard and rejected the gospel during their physical lives. And they can't really plug into a Paradise, where humans go who have heard and accepted the gospel during their physical lives. But they can plug into a Lugg just fine, can't they? Jesus doesn't only visit Paradise after he dies; he visits Lugg also, and apparently he will quite frequently continue to! We've got a group of people that needs Jesus' message after they die but before they go to Hell or Heaven, and the Bible repeatedly alludes to a place that fits them perfectly.*

But why doesn't God just tell us more openly and abundantly about Lugg, or whatever his name for it is? Actually, there are two really good reasons. First, it wouldn't make a hill o' beans of difference. If God chose to wax eloquent about Lugg in the Bible, the only people who would know about it are those with meaningful access to the message of Jesus, and none of those people could ever go to Lugg! Those who actually *will* be going there would never hear about it anyway, so what's the point in God elaborating on it in the first place? If I wrote you a letter describing all the characteristics of a far-off land, detailing exactly how to get there and what will

* There are two Lugg look-alikes that have been proposed as alternative explanations for how those without meaningful access to the gospel are judged justly; however, they are highly problematic for the reasons delineated here.⁸⁰

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happen once you arrive, but then I told you that because you just read the letter, you and anyone else you share it with will never be able to go there, would you find that helpful or worthy of your time? Instead, God does the most sensible thing—as always—and spends the vast majority of his words regarding the hereafter explaining the places that we *could* be going to, especially Hell and Heaven, but also Tartarus and Paradise. And you can't get *to* Lugg from any one of those places, since the gospel would already be known to you. You can only get *from* Lugg to either Tartarus or Paradise. And once in Tartarus—like the rich man—you can't cross the chasm to Paradise; you will inevitably find yourself in Hell. Likewise, once in Paradise—like Lazarus—you can't cross the chasm to Tartarus; you will inevitably find yourself in Heaven. Therefore, these places, particularly the eternal ones, are much more helpful to learn about than Lugg, especially since people are only in Lugg long enough to choose one of them anyway.

Second, if God went on and on telling humans about a place where people were able to hear and accept Jesus' message after their deaths, even if deep down these folks knew this place didn't apply to them, what would their curiosity lead them to do? Be honest. They would try to find ways to *make* it apply to them, ways to allow them to believe and live however they want here, while still giving them a chance in Lugg to eek their way into Heaven just before it's too late. God's words may reveal that a place like Lugg is not an option for them, but they will find catastrophically creative ways to convince themselves that it is, and they will teach others to do the same. God doesn't want us to have to admit too late that we weren't eligible for Lugg, so he gives us enough hints about it to answer several significant questions about the hereafter and then falls silent. Consequently, I have tried to limit this discussion to these hints and how they logically connect to God's other words, so as not to arouse any more curiosity than he has. In case I have failed in that regard, let me directly discourage you from indulging attempts to make Lugg accessible in your mind to those of us with meaningful access to the gospel. God keeps our focus on Hell and Heaven for a reason—that's where it benefits us the most—and the biblical narrative reflects that.

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“I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go” (Isaiah 48:17).

I hope it's now clear that Tartarus, Paradise, and Lugg aren't just concepts we've discussed to address unfamiliar biblical references. Neither are they random, incidental locales in God's grand scheme, like a “Mystery Spot” along a highway connecting two much more important places. They are absolutely necessary for God's purpose for humans to be accomplished, and they are found in the Bible to do exactly that, not to needlessly make the afterlife a bit more colorful or complicated. If God's purpose for us is to enjoy eternal, perfect community with him, he has to give us free will. The use of our free will to sin forces the knowledge and experience of evil in this world, which results in (among many other tragedies) the deaths of the very young and the lifelong mentally disabled. God cannot physically communicate the gospel to these two groups while alive on earth. Therefore, they (along with others) do not have an adequate chance during life to accept or reject it, so he must create a spiritually neutral location like Lugg between death and judgment to maintain his purpose for them. But if he must create a place for them during this time, if he wishes to raise and judge every human at the same time, and if he has not yet completed Hell or Heaven for humans to inhabit, he also must create places between death and judgment where those destined for Hell or Heaven can go: Tartarus and Paradise. And it only makes sense to place these three essential regions in one universal abode of the dead. Sheol/Hades and its three realms, just like Hell and Heaven, are vital for God to achieve his purpose in creating humanity, and that's why we see all of them in the Bible. He has given us all the information about them that we need in order to understand our future. By bringing his Old and New Testaments together in beautiful harmony, God unveils a simple, rational, and biblical description of what's in store for us after death.

If you have meaningful access to the message of Jesus in this life and reject it as true, you will head to Tartarus in Sheol/Hades when you die, a place of “torment” and “agony.” If you have meaningful access to the message of Jesus in this life and accept it as true,

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you will head to Paradise in Sheol/Hades when you die, a place of “peace,” “comfort,” and “rest,” where we know you can be with others who also want to be there, reminisce about life on earth, observe those who are still alive, or simply “sleep in death” (Luke 16:22-31, Revelation 6:9-11, 1 Samuel 28:11-19, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Those who do not have meaningful access to the message of Jesus in this life—which don’t include any of us now—will head to a part of Sheol/Hades that we’ve called Lugg—limbo until getting the gospel. This is a place of some obscurity to us for our own good, but a place of exposure to God’s solution to them, so that they can freely choose how to respond, hopefully for their own good. Then when the dead are raised together from Sheol/Hades on the last day, every human spirit will have heard the message of Jesus fairly, and all will have chosen how they wish to respond to it (Revelation 20:11-15). Those in Tartarus go to Hell, those in Paradise go to Heaven, and the inhabitants of Lugg will have already left for Tartarus or Paradise beforehand by their own free will. “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.” Why? Well, the dead are raised, so death has no power. And the spirits have gone from it, so Sheol/Hades has no purpose. We started our tour of Sheol/Hades by observing its consistent link to when a human meets his end, and we’ve finished the tour by observing when Sheol/Hades meets *its* end.

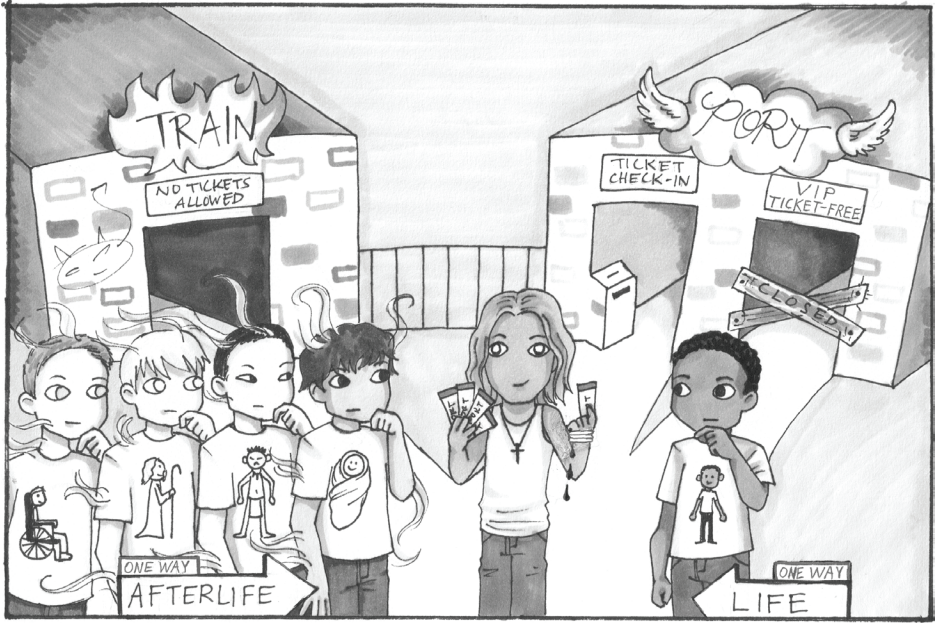
I realize that all of this may be new and strange to you, but not as much as it might seem. The departed who are not saved *are* in a rather hellish place. The deceased who are saved *are* in a rather heavenly place of peace, comfort, and rest where they can keep watch over you. But neither party is in Hell or Heaven, and there’s no reason they need to be. If you’re willing to accept a postmortem existence for humans in Hell or Heaven, then why not in Sheol/Hades too? After all, did the understanding of the biblical Hell and Heaven that you had before you read this booklet adequately account for all the biblical locales in the hereafter and adequately address what happens to every group of humans who don’t have meaningful access to the gospel? If it did, I would love to learn anything you might be able to teach me! However, my experience has consistently demonstrated that people often avoid, disregard, or simply don’t know of the many

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verses revealing Sheol, Hades, Tartarus, the Abyss, Paradise, and even Lugg. Perhaps such passages are often considered mysterious or controversial simply due to a lack of openness to options that allow them to make sense. A construct of the afterlife only flexible enough to contain Hell and Heaven forces us into biblically and logically inconsistent explanations for the fate of those who haven't heard Jesus' message, as there is no room for considering a place between death and judgment for people who need it. Conversely, synthesizing everything the Bible has to say with an open mind helps heal our hereafters with a framework that is straightforward, makes sense, and welcomes God's words to speak for themselves.

God desires to, is able to, and will reach every single human being equally with the message of Jesus, even if we consider it more monotonous, annoying, or intrusive than a request for donating blood! The locations and timeline he uses to pull this ultimate publicity stunt are biblical, necessary, and make a lot of sense once we familiarize ourselves with them. Just as we'd expect from a God who wants to give life.

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Five people are converging on a road that is about to fork, and they must make a decision which way to go. Four of them have already died—spirits who in physical life wore the bodies of a person with severe brain damage from birth, an Old Testament shepherd, an isolated Pacific island native, and a miscarried fetus. Therefore, they are in their afterlives in Lugg. The fifth is a spirit who is indistinguishable from the body he’s wearing because he has not yet died. Therefore, he is in his life in our physical world. All five spirits have a choice between the Tartarus Train or the Paradise Port. Jesus, who has already been wounded, approaches them all before they must decide and makes admission to Paradise Port equally and freely available to everyone. They can only take the Tartarus Train if they refuse the ticket. These spirits are all fully capable of understanding this decision, and they must knowingly accept Jesus’ offer to be admitted to the port—no one can get in automatically or in any other way. Also, no one can stay in or return to this physical life, and no one from this life can be exposed to Jesus’ offer and then proceed to Lugg. Both the train and port are walled, and as rail and sea transportation can never join, the decisions made will be permanent.

Notes

1. Galli, M. (2011). *God Wins: Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News Is Better than Love Wins*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 129.
2. Lewis, C.S. (2005). *Made for Heaven: And Why on Earth It Matters*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 65-66.
3. Wright, N.T. (1994). *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, p. 112.
4. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p. 160.
5. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 355.
6. Segal, A. (2004). *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*. New York, NY: Doubleday, p. 207.
7. Stone, P. (2010). *Secrets from Beyond the Grave: The Amazing Mysteries of Eternity, Paradise, and the Land of Lost Souls*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, pp. 178-179.
8. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 355.
9. Ibid., p. 355.
10. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p. 160.
11. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, pp. 354-356.
12. I do not bring up *Heaven* to belittle it. Although we will continue to wrestle with more of its conclusions, it does teach many important truths about Heaven and certainly seeks to at least present what the Bible says. Rather, I highlight its response to the issue of children's salvation because it is a hugely popular book by a very influential speaker. It has sold well over 600,000 copies, and the first thing its cover states about the author is that he "is a leading authority on Heaven." When such a dominant personae teaches people a conclusion that is easy on the ears but biblically unsupported, it creates a perfect storm of subjectivity clouding an unbiased assessment of the Bible. As I told you from the get-go, I

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only want us to be able to discover what is most likely to be true regarding the hereafter. I will take the side that is less appealing to your emotions if it means that I can deliver a more accurate framework *and* be less manipulative, and that's an approach I think we can both agree is admirable and worth considering. Also, please realize that like some of you, my own experiences would lead me to be biased toward the automatic salvation of children, so I'm not asking you to favor logical and biblical reasoning over your feelings without me doing the same myself. In fact, there are many concepts put forth in this book that I didn't grow up believing, still don't feel like believing, and only decided to believe because God's words made too much sense for me to ignore.

13. Russell, J.B. (2006). *Paradise Misaid: How We Lost Heaven and How We Can Regain It*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc, p. 8.
14. Wittmer, M. (2004). *Heaven Is a Place on Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, p. 174.
15. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, pp. 35-36.
16. This postmortem process also applies to the people in the Bible whose bodies were raised to life by Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, Peter, and Paul, as well as to those who came back to life in the valley of dry bones and immediately following Jesus' death (1 Kings 17:17-24, 2 Kings 4:17-27, Mark 5:22-43, Luke 7:11-17, John 11:1-44, Acts 9:36-43, Acts 20:7-12, Ezekiel 37:1-14, Matthew 27:50-53). For every one of these folks, it is clearly the physical body being resurrected—the one that previously died. Paul is clear that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” because first, “the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:50, 53). This makes perfect sense. Our current bodies—as amazing as they are—are flawed and subject to further imperfection. We cannot take these bodies to a perfect Heaven, nor would we want to. As “there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body,” a perfect resurrected body that is imperishable. Those going to Heaven “will *all* be changed” at the last trumpet when Jesus returns and the end comes (1 Corinthians 15:22-24, 51-52). Therefore, because Jesus has not yet

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returned, *none* of the resurrected folks above were brought back to life in their imperishable bodies. Instead, they were brought back to life in their earthly, natural bodies, just as if they had never physically died in the first place. As these perishable bodies had to eventually die again, such temporary resurrections would not have enabled these folks to go to the current heaven or Heaven before everyone else. Only permanent resurrection into imperishable, spiritual bodies is fit for these places, and humans don't get those bodies until Jesus returns and the end comes. And if these folks *could* have gone to the current heaven despite rising without their imperishable bodies, many *would* have been there after their first death, some for several years. So wouldn't it be terribly cruel of Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, Peter, and Paul to yank their spirits back from the current heaven into their old bodies? I'm not sure I'd be too happy in that case, would you? This all goes to show that none of these accounts of resurrection can be used as evidence to suggest that people are in the current heaven right now.

Some claim that humans only needed to wait until Jesus' resurrection before those who were saved could be raised and go to the current heaven, and they use as examples the reanimation of people's bodies in Matthew 27:50-53, as well as the criminal crucified next to Jesus, who is told he'll be with Jesus later that day in paradise.¹⁷ The glaring problem is that Jesus hadn't been resurrected yet in either case, whether immediately after he died or later that day, right? Besides, we have no textual reason to believe there was anything special about people in the Bible who were raised to life on earth after Jesus' resurrection, rather than before. There is no reason to think that the former were raised to go to the current heaven while the latter were raised only to die again on earth. The Bible makes no distinction between them; it simply states that their physical, perishable bodies were brought back to life.

Others might argue, "man is destined to die once" (Hebrew 9:27); therefore, those brought back to life in the Bible couldn't have died again and must have been able to go right to the current heaven. However, if these same people claim that the

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resurrected couldn't go to there until after Jesus rose again, then those brought back to life in the Old Testament *must* have died a second time. Instead of Hebrews 9:27 supporting an instant post-mortem heavenly warp, this verse is simply stating the rule of thumb for human death. Aside from the exceedingly rare exceptions we've already addressed, humans physically die once. And none of them goes straight to the current heaven. If you still have any doubt of this, 30 or so years after Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul continues to maintain that at that time not a single human (other than Jesus, of course) "has seen or can see" God the Father where he dwells "in unapproachable light," including the Christians who died between Jesus' resurrection and Paul's writing (1 Timothy 6:16). In contrast, Jesus promises that the "pure in heart" "will see God" (Matthew 5:8), and Job clarifies twice that this only occurs after *our* resurrection, not after Jesus' resurrection. Once their "*flesh be renewed...they will see God's face and shout for joy; he will restore them to full well-being*" (Job 33:19-26). "After my skin has been destroyed, *yet in my flesh I will see God;*" "*in the end he will stand on the earth*" (Job 19:25-27). The saved *will* finally gain access to God the Father, but only on the New Earth after judgment day. So wherever people go after death, whether their physical bodies die once or twice, and whether before or after Jesus' resurrection, it apparently isn't to be with God in the current heaven. Jesus is the only human who has been to the current heaven, and he is the only human who needs to be there, as he has a job there to do. He is constantly interceding for us even now to satisfy God's just punishment for the sins of the saved, who will join him only after he returns (Romans 8:34, 1 Corinthians 15:22-23).

17. Stone, P. (2010). *Secrets from Beyond the Grave: The Amazing Mysteries of Eternity, Paradise, and the Land of Lost Souls*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, pp. 71-73.
18. Ibid., pp. 129-130.
19. Wright, N.T. (2008). *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 169.

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20. Stanford, P. (2002). *Heaven: A Guide to the Undiscovered Country*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 230.
21. Miller, L. (2010). *Heaven: Our Enduring Fascination with the Afterlife*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 54.
22. Morris, H. (3 Mar 2009). "The Heaven of Heavens." Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: <http://www.icr.org/article/4360/>
23. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 60.
24. Miller, L. (2010). *Heaven: Our Enduring Fascination with the Afterlife*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 29.
25. Ibid., p. 31.
26. Segal, A. (2004). *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*. New York, NY: Doubleday, p. 154.
27. Wright, N.T. (2008). *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 162.
28. Some argue that the humans in these accounts are simply all the saved who died and went to the current heaven, existing as spirits or in some intermediate body *before* they receive their imperishable, resurrected bodies and before the first resurrection.²⁹⁻³⁰ This is problematic for several reasons. First, unlike many who will be saved, every one of the humans in the passages we just studied endured particularly harsh persecution for their faith. They "had been slain because of the word of God," their lives were sacrificially "offered as firstfruits" to God, they "had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus," they "have come out of the great tribulation," and were "victorious over the beast" at that time, refusing to worship or obey demonic forces upon pain of death (Revelation 6:9, 14:4, 7:14, 20:4, 13:11-17, 15:2).

Second, the Bible never mentions any kind of intermediate body, nor does it teach that humanity in general undergoes any intermediate steps between Sheol following physical death and resurrection into our imperishable bodies on judgment day, as we've already seen. Besides, how would an intermediate body be any different than a resurrection body and why would it need to be? If the intermediate body is perfect enough to live in the

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current heaven where God resides, then how would a resurrection body be any better? And if it is better, then why wouldn't God give it to us right away and ditch the pointless intermediate body? Jesus can exist in the current heaven with his resurrection body, so why can't we? Because humans generally don't go to reside in the current heaven with any sort of body (1 Corinthians 15:42-53).

Third, if humans have already been admitted to the perfect current heaven with God right now (and if others have already been admitted to Hell), whether in an intermediate body or as a spirit, what is the point of judgment day? To complete the paperwork and make it official? To offer *Terminator 2* a cool subtitle? Is God really going to call everybody over from the current heaven and everybody up from Hell for a judgment day huddle just to say, "Yep, this really is how it's gonna be forever. Meeting adjourned." Of course not! With the understandable exceptions of Jesus and the martyrs, who are involved in the first resurrection so that they can reign with Jesus on earth for a period of time, no human goes to the current heaven until judgment day. It is only then when Sheol is emptied and all other humans are resurrected to the current heaven for judgment, after which they enter the New Earth or Gehenna. The martyrs "came to life (*the first resurrection*) and reigned with Christ a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life (*the second resurrection*) until the thousand years were ended" (Revelation 20:4-5).

Some claim that the "great multitude," "armies of heaven," and "twenty-four elders" in Revelation 19:1-14 represent other humans in the current heaven prior to the second resurrection on judgment day.³¹ However, the same term "great multitude" in Revelation 7:9 unequivocally describes the martyrs, not any other humans. The armies of heaven are almost certainly angelic, as there are zero definite biblical examples of humans serving in God's heavenly military, although we know that angels do (Daniel 10:13, Revelation 12:7-9). As for the twenty-four elders who are mentioned throughout Revelation, some argue that they are the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve apostles, because the latter do sit on thrones with Jesus (Matthew 19:28).³²⁻³³ However, this does

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not happen until “the renewal of all things” *after* judgment day (Revelation 21:1-5), and every mention of the elders’ thrones in Revelation occurs before this renewal. Not to mention that John is one of the twelve apostles and does not include himself among the elders as he describes them to us, further demonstrating their unknown identity and nature. In fact, these elders are never called human, and distinction is made between them and human saints in Revelation 5:8. Moreover, the elders are almost universally mentioned in tandem with the “four living creatures,” who are anything but human, suggesting that the elders are not human either. They even distinguish *themselves* from the “people who revere (*God’s*) name, both great and small” (Revelation 11:16-18). These people, clearly representing all of the saved, had not yet been judged, whereas the elders would already have been if they were humans in the current heaven. Besides, for the elders to be human, all of the passages we’ve visited above demonstrating the lack of human presence in the current heaven before the first resurrection would have to be ignored.

29. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, pp. 65-71.
30. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p. 74.
31. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 69.
32. Stone, P. (2010). *Secrets from Beyond the Grave: The Amazing Mysteries of Eternity, Paradise, and the Land of Lost Souls*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, p. 82.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
34. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p. 34.
35. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 283.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
37. Wright, N.T. (2008). *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 169.

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38. Enns, P. (2011). *Heaven Revealed*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, p. 34.
39. Stanford, P. (2002). *Heaven: A Guide to the Undiscovered Country*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 38.
40. Segal, A. (2004). *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*. New York, NY: Doubleday, p. 135.
41. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 69.
42. Miller, L. (2010). *Heaven: Our Enduring Fascination with the Afterlife*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 147.
43. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 47.
44. Driscoll, M., Breshears, G. (2010). *Doctrine: What Christians Should Believe*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, pp. 418-420.
45. Stone, P. (2010). *Secrets from Beyond the Grave: The Amazing Mysteries of Eternity, Paradise, and the Land of Lost Souls*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, p. 209.
46. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 48.
47. Segal, A. (2004). *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*. New York, NY: Doubleday, p. 136.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 379.
50. Wiese, B. (2010). *23 Questions About Hell: Everything You Want-and Need-to Know!* Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, pp. 5-6.
51. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, pp. 61-63.
52. Bell, R. (2011). *The Love Wins Companion: A Study Guide for Those Who Want to Go Deeper*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 62.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
54. Stanford, P. (2002). *Heaven: A Guide to the Undiscovered Country*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 30.
55. Lewis, C.S. (1946). *The Great Divorce*. New York, NY: Touchstone, p. 121.

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56. Segal, A. (2004). *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*. New York, NY: Doubleday, p. 243.
57. Stanford, P. (2002). *Heaven: A Guide to the Undiscovered Country*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 39.
58. Segal, A. (2004). *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*. New York, NY: Doubleday, p. 243.
59. Connor, N. The Main Regions of the Underworld. Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: <http://www.netplaces.com/classical-mythology/the-dark-prince/the-main-regions-of-the-underworld.htm>
60. Segal, A. (2004). *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*. New York, NY: Doubleday, p. 244.
61. Ibid., pp. 377-378.
62. "Paradeisos". *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 1940. Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3Dpara%2Fdeisos>
63. "Paradeisos". *Strong's Greek Lexicon*. Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: <http://www.eliyah.com/cgi-bin/strongs.cgi?file=greeklexicon&isin dex=paradise>
64. "Paradeisos". GreekBible.com. 2010. Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: http://www.greekbible.com/l.php?para/deisos_n----dsm-_p
65. (16 Jun 2009). "Miracle Max." Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9tAKLTktYo>
66. Wright, N.T. (2008). *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York, NY: Harper-Collins Publishers, p. 150.
67. Stanford, P. (2002). *Heaven: A Guide to the Undiscovered Country*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 31.
68. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 63.
69. Miller, L. (2010). *Heaven: Our Enduring Fascination with the Afterlife*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 29.
70. "Abraham's Bosom". *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abraham's%20bosom>
71. (2011). "Abraham's Bosom." Retrieved on 30 Jan 2013 from: <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/362-abraham-s-bosom>

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72. Wright, N.T. (2008). *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 172.
73. Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, p. 63.
74. Some argue that the spirits here refer to supernatural beings, specifically the demons in Tartarus. The evidence we are given is that “this passage probably refers to another strange passage in Genesis 6:1-4, where evil angels apparently had sexual relations with women and were ‘imprisoned’ by God for it,” a passage that “raises many other questions, I’m sure.”⁷⁵ Unhelpfully, such questions are neither addressed nor answered, and this argument is quite problematic. To start, neither angels nor demons are even mentioned in Genesis 6:1-4; rather it is “the sons of God” who “married” these women and “had children by them.” In Luke 3:38, Jesus’ paternal genealogy is traced all the way back to Adam through the descendants of Seth, “the son of Adam, the son of God.” Therefore, Seth’s line can be referred to as “the sons of God.” This makes sense, because the offspring of these women they married were “heroes of old, men of renown,” as we would expect of such a lineage of newly free-willed, spirited human beings (see Note 19 of Booklet 2). Conversely, angelic beings like demons don’t marry; therefore, they can’t be “the sons of God” (Mark 12:25). Nor would God’s words ever call demons “sons of God” or be likely to speak positively of demon/human offspring, if such progeny were even possible! Besides, merely nine verses after telling us that Jesus preached to these spirits, Peter confirms that “the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead” (1 Peter 3:19, 4:6), and demons don’t die, being non-physical spirits. But humans do, so Jesus must be preaching to them. Therefore, since I have no reason to assume any association between 1 Peter 3:18-20 and Genesis 6:1-4, I don’t. But even if we did assume one and accept that the “spirits” and “the sons of God” in these passages are the same—knowing that “the sons of God” are most likely human and certainly not demonic—then the spirits being preached to would still be human anyway. Moreover, why would

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Jesus be preaching to *anyone* in Tartarus, particularly demons? There is no biblical evidence that demons are saved, and Jesus is a human savior from human sin, so his message wouldn't even apply to demons! Some claim that Jesus is not evangelizing to them; instead, he is making a special trip to Tartarus just to preach victory over these disobedient demons.⁷⁶ Since when is preaching gloating? And since when is Jesus pro-gloating to begin with (Matthew 5:43-48)? Yes, he makes a triumphant "public spectacle" of demonic forces, but only as he hangs dying on the cross for all to see (Colossians 2:15), not on a victory lap to Tartarus, a decidedly non-public venue anyway.

So the argument that Jesus preaches to demons instead of humans really isn't supportable. Yet without any further evidence, its supporters confidently proclaim that 1 Peter 3:18-20 "almost certainly doesn't mean that Jesus was preaching the gospel to unbelievers who had died."⁷⁷ "Jesus did not preach the gospel to unbelievers in Hell, at least not in an evangelistic sense."⁷⁸ True, this would have taken place in Lugg—not Hell—but in what other sense *would* Jesus preach the gospel to unbelievers? This is a perfect example of how a belief—in this case, that humans go right to Hell or the current heaven upon dying—can blind a person to what the Bible says, leading to inconsistency. In contrast, if our preconceptions can be put aside while we read the Bible, we will find freeing answers that were never possible before.

75. Chan, F., Sprinkle, P. (2011). *Erasing Hell: What God Said About Eternity, and the Things We've Made Up*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, p. 161.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid., p. 162.

79. Miller, L. (2010). *Heaven: Our Enduring Fascination with the Afterlife*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, pp. 143-144.

80. It's important to distinguish Lugg from two other attempts people make to address the fate of those without access to the gospel on earth. The first is the judgment of faith, which led to the many conundrums we slogged through in Chapter 8. Its proponents

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justify an immediate postmortem assignment to Hell or the current heaven by arguing that everyone—including the very young, the very incapacitated, and the very isolated—meaningfully and specifically gets exposed to the gospel during their physical lives, even if it's too mysterious to figure out how. God knows, so we don't have to. This judgment of faith is different from Lugg in three ways. First, it entirely depends on universal human exposure to the gospel during physical life, an unexplained phenomenon that we've learned is exceedingly unlikely, if not impossible. Second, it necessitates more than one judgment day, a concept we know is opposed by the Bible. Third, it is an explanation forced by an unwillingness to let go of immediate postmortem human access to the current heaven. If the Bible's teaching that no one goes there right after they die is acknowledged, then there is no need for this judgment of faith that is riddled with so many problems. Lugg *does* acknowledge this teaching, so it is not forced to encumber itself with unnecessary inconsistencies.

The second concept to be distinguished from Lugg similarly involves a postmortem judgment of faith and is similarly forced by a belief in immediate entrance to the current heaven following death. Its proponents state that a person who just died without access to the gospel goes to Hell or the current heaven based on their general commitment to God during life, not on acceptance of God's solution for us in Jesus. So the faith being judged here is vaguely generic, rather than faith in Jesus. As such, this position is occasionally clarified by claiming that Jesus' message is still necessary, because a person going to the current heaven would believe in the gospel upon or after entering it. But either way, this person is saved, considered perfect, and admitted there *before* the gospel, his acceptance of it, and the presence of the Holy Spirit can play their absolutely vital roles in his salvation. There's no way around the fact that supporters of this second concept are forced to argue that neither Jesus nor the Holy Spirit are necessary for salvation, as a person can be assigned to the current heaven independently of them. "Thus it is possible for the unevangelized to be saved without having knowledge of Christ or the

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exact nature of his gift to humanity.”⁸¹ Aside from bordering on universalism, as everyone—evangelized or not—demonstrates some sort of general commitment to a god (whether a being or an idea), this position contradicts God’s words, not to mention everything we’ve learned above and will learn below regarding salvation.

Jesus counters, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you *profess your faith and are saved*” (Romans 10:9-10). “And you also *were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance*” (Ephesians 1:13-14). Both the words of God and the established logic of his unique solution of Jesus give us no wiggle room. *No one* could be considered saved or be admitted to the current heaven prior to accepting Jesus’ message, because they would have yet to have their imperfection removed and receive the Holy Spirit. No one can be saved before they are saved, so they are not.

So what would lead people to espouse this notion? First, it is emotionally easier. It’s less jarring to teach and accept that merely some vague commitment to God can accomplish salvation for us, even if we have to reject God’s words and the logic of the gospel to do so. Second and once again, it is a position forced upon many folks by their unwavering belief in an immediate postmortem trip to the current heaven. We will discover in Booklet 4 that human faith—and not even necessarily faith specifically in Jesus—does *initiate* the salvation process, but this process cannot be completed and a person cannot be considered saved or perfect until *after* that faith can be applied to the gospel. Lugg gives unevangelized humans a biblical way to hear and accept the message of Jesus, without it having to occur either before they die—which would be essentially impossible for babies and the brain-injured—or after

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their residence in the current heaven has somehow already been granted.

I realize that I am continually rehashing the point that emotionally satisfying or deeply entrenched arguments believed by many Christians, such as the automatic salvation of children and immediate access to the current heaven after death, are both unbiblical and illogical. But I only do it to help us find truth about the hereafter, and I warned you that that this quest to explore God's words without me emotionally manipulating you would not be easy at times. But it is worth it. When you reconsider the havoc that such explanations wreak on the consistency of the Bible, on God's goodness and justice, on the legitimacy of human salvation, and on our ability to provide logical answers to so many important questions, it's much easier to consider other options. If we are to understand the biblical hereafter, then the bibles of feelings and familiarity must give way to the whole of what the Bible teaches us. Lugg is a great place to start.

81. Stone, P. (2010). *Secrets from Beyond the Grave: the Amazing Mysteries of Eternity, Paradise, and the Land of Lost Souls*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, p. 188.

